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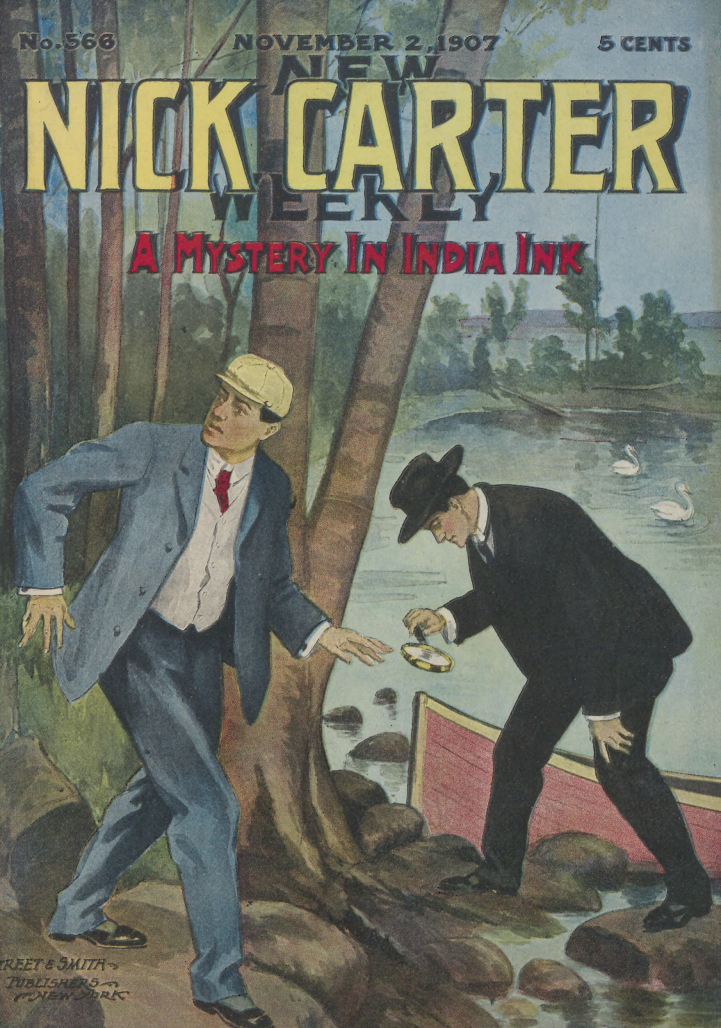
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A MYSTERY IN INDIA INK



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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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A Mystery in India Ink;

OR,

NICK CARTER IN SEARCH OF A SECRET.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRIME AT HOTEL CALIGULA.

Roger Sturtevant's valet paused outside the door, tray in hand, and rapped.

Then, without pausing for a reply, because his rap against the door was intended merely as an announcement of his return, he opened it and passed through, closing it behind him.

The tray he carried contained toast, and eggs, and coffee for his master's breakfast, which he had gone downstairs to prepare, rather than to leave it to the regular hotel servants.

Before departing on this errand, he had prepared Mr. Sturtevant's bath, and laid out his clothing for the day, to which both master and man had been looking forward with some pleasurable anticipation.

Morris had been absent from the room long enough so that now upon his return he expected to find that Mr. Sturtevant had finished his bath, and was awaiting his breakfast, perhaps with some impatience; and it was, therefore, with not a little surprise that he discovered him reclining upon a sleepy-hollow chair near one of the parlor windows of the suite, still with his bathrobe thrown about him, and apparently in precisely the same position in which he had left him, almost three-quarters of an hour earlier.

Sturtevant's back was half toward the valet, so that there was no view of his face possible, but Morris knew, because of the tousled condition of his master's hair, that he had not been near the bathroom, and he doubted if Mr. Sturtevant had moved at all since he left him.

Roger Sturtevant did not turn his head, or move, or make any sign of recognition when his valet entered the room, and the latter moved silently across it, and deposited his tray upon a side table, while he proceeded to prepare another and a smaller table for the accommodation of the dishes and food.

He went about his work silently, as was his custom, and had everything in readiness for Sturtevant to sit at the table before he spoke to him; and then, in his quiet and unobtrusive voice, he announced:

"Your breakfast is served, sir."

Sturtevant gave no sign that he heard, and the valet waited deferentially a moment or two, when he repeated, this time in a little louder tone:

"Breakfast is served, Mr. Sturtevant."

As before, there was no answer, and the valet, after

another short silence, during which he wondered if his master had dropped asleep again in the chair, stepped lightly across the room, and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Mr. Sturtevant, sir," he said; "your breakfast is served."

It was now, for the first time, that the valet noticed something peculiar in the attitude of his master, and with a sudden tightening of the lips and a feeling of fright that he could not have explained at the instant, he so far forgot his usual conduct as to shake his master roughly by the shoulder, and to call out, this time with some excitement:

"Breakfast, sir; breakfast, I tell you!"

But even as he uttered these exclamations he knew that his master would not answer—that he would never answer again.

The knowledge came to him intuitively in that instant that Roger Sturtevant was dead, and that the awful climax of his existence had somehow come upon him during that short interval while he had been alone in his suite of rooms at the Hotel Caligula.

Morris, the valet of Roger Sturtevant, was rather a character, in his way. He had many times given evidence of his coolness and resourcefulness, as well as of his fearlessness, during the time he had served this master, whom he had learned to regard with unusual affection.

But now, when the awful truth came home to him so suddenly; now, when he realized that he had already been in the room with the dead body of his master five minutes or more without realizing the calamity that had happened, he was startled more than he had ever been in his life, so that for the greater part of a minute he stood like one suddenly turned to stone, incapable of further motion, incompetent to utter another sound, literally paralyzed by the horror of it.

The process of mind by which one pulls one's self together, as the saying goes, in a moment of extremity, can never be fully explained, but in that moment of partial paralysis of nerve and mind, Morris realized that he must be cool, and that it was important that he should conduct himself with judgment.

He knew that his master was dead without yet having gone far enough to understand the cause of death—whether it were natural, or if a crime had been committed.

Indeed, he was almost afraid to pass around in front of the silent and motionless body in the chair to investigate.

Ninety-nine out of a hundred, under the same circumstances and conditions, would have called out wildly, would have shaken the still limp body of the dead man, and would have committed other unreasoning acts of impulse to assure themselves of the truth of their fears, and to ascertain the cause of them.

But Morris stood there, motionless, for quite a space of time, during which he thought deeply, even if somewhat wildly, not upon the predicament in which he found himself, but with the effort to compel his own acts into the proper channel—the one which would best serve the exigencies of the moment, and the incidents which must follow upon it. His conduct during the next few moments is worthy of special comment here, for it amazed even Nick Carter, later, when he heard about it, that a man, constituted as Morris was, should be able under such conditions to hold himself so well in hand, and to shape his acts as if each one had been thought out previously.

Morris had been brought into contact with the detective quite recently. He knew that Nick Carter and his master were close friends, and somehow in that moment of terror that came to him with the discovery of the calamity that had occurred, he realized that the moment was fraught with the utmost importance, and that he must so conduct himself that every incident that was associated with it might be communicated plainly and completely to the detective.

And so he stood there until he had gained thorough control over himself; until he could act with deliberation and calmness; and then he passed slowly around the chair until he stood in front of it, and could look down directly upon the body of his master who was dead.

Perhaps the reader can imagine something of the self-control that had to be exercised by this valet when he compelled himself to stand almost rigidly and forced himself to keep his hands off of the body of the man he loved so dearly.

But the first glance upon Roger Sturtevant, when Morris had passed around in front of him, revealed the cause of death, and at the same instant convinced Morris of its instantaneousness.

The head of a hatpin, huge, octagonal, and made of jet, glared at him like a fierce black eye, where it showed so plainly against the white skin of Roger Sturtevant's breast.

It protruded, Morris thought, two or three inches from the flesh, and even in that moment of forced calmness he believed that the pin was a large one, perhaps eight or ten inches in length.

He saw from its position that his master must have been struck directly through the heart with it, and, therefore, had probably died instantly with the impact. How long he stood there, looking down upon this terrible scene, he never could have told, for during it, save for the twitching of his fingers, and the tightening of his lips, and the spasmodic intaking and outputting of his breathing, he made no move.

But at last he sighed deeply, straightening himself slowly, turned, and, as if he were afraid of awakening the dead man in the chair, tiptoed across the room and through the door into the one adjoining it, where he raised the receiver from the hook of the telephone, and calmly asked for Nick Carter's number.

"Mr. Sturtevant is dead," he announced, with that same cold exactitude, as soon as he received an answer; and then, without waiting for a further reply—without realizing in the least to whom he had made this announcement, he replaced the receiver, and returned to the room where he had found his master.

Again he passed around in front of him, and stood there, looking down upon the body of Roger Sturtevant, in a condition of mind that almost amounted to coma; and so he was standing, when, a half-hour later, Nick Carter opened the door from the hallway, and entered the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDEN HAIRPIN.

It happened that the detective at the other end of the telephone had answered it in person.

It happened, likewise, that he had recognized the voice of Morris, and when he received the startling announcement that the valet made to him, he had permitted a moment to elapse before responding to it, so that during that interval Morris had left the telephone.

The very calmness of the announcement and the manner in which it was made, had convinced Nick Carter of its truth; and the fact that Morris had immediately hung up the receiver and gone away from his end of the wire, told Nick as plainly as words could have done, of the effort at self-control that Morris had exercised while conveying the intelligence to him.

Others might have insisted upon further information over the wire by summoning central and demanding that the connection be made again, but Nick, instead of doing this, had seized his hat and hurried from the house without a moment's delay, and, therefore, arrived at the Hotel Caligula within a very short time after Morris spoke to him.

Entering the hotel, he passed directly to the elevator, and so on to the apartment occupied by Roger Sturtevant—an apartment which he had retained for years, and which, notwithstanding his purchase of the beautiful old place at the upper end of Manhattan Island, which bore the reputation of a haunted house, he still called home. The "haunted house" was just now undergoing an extensive system of repairs, which was all the more reason why Sturtevant should be staying at his apartment.

Nick had rapped twice upon the door of Sturtevant's rooms without receiving any response, for Morris was so absorbed in his contemplation of the body of his master that he heard nothing, and it was then that the detective opened the door and entered the room, to come upon the scene that has already been described.

Even then Morris did not turn his head, or give any indication that he was aware of the interruption; it seemed as if he were hypnotized into semi-unconsciousness by the horror of the scene that confronted him, and by the shock that had fallen upon him by reason of this sudden and unexpected death of his master.

As Nick stepped into the room, he saw that Morris was entirely unconscious of his presence, and so he closed the door softly, and then moved silently around until he was behind the valet, and, therefore, occupied the same point of vantage for viewing the body of the dead man that Morris did. What he saw has already been described, in effect.

The young millionaire was seated in the depths of the sleepy-hollow chair, and, save for the fact that his eyes were open and staring, he might have been sleeping for all that his attitude and the position of his body indicated.

The head was slightly upon one side, and had doubtless dropped into that position by the relaxation of the muscles following upon the deadly stroke of the pin; the hands rested negligently upon the arms of the chair; the right leg was thrown across the knee of the left one; there was no garment whatever upon the body save the bathrobe already described, which was tied about the waist with a tasseled cord; the feet rested in a pair of Chinese slippers, made of grass, and the enormous jet head of the hatpin glistened and gleamed above the white skin of the victim, two or three inches from the flesh.

The expression of the dead face was natural; Nick judged from it that Sturtevant had died instantly, had been struck while he was still in the chair in the position he now occupied, and that the hand that dealt the blow had probably reached over him from behind the chair, so that it was doubtful if the victim had seen, or even known, of the presence of his murderer.

Still standing silently behind the valet, the detective took his eyes from the dead body, and moved them slowly about the room from place to place, investigating it; but he saw no indication of any other presence; there was apparently nothing disturbed, and it appeared as if the murderer had entered at the door, precisely as he had done himself, had stepped forward, struck the blow, and retired as he came.

Convinced of this, and, of course, entertaining no thought that the valet could be the guilty man, the detective reached forward and touched him tentatively upon the arm, whereat Morris shivered and shuddered, and then, without turning his head, seeming to be held in the position he occupied by the fascination and the horror that faced him, he murmured:

"Is that you, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, Morris," replied the detective.

"You received my message?"

"Yes, Morris; and I came at once."

"Do you see him, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"Do you see what killed him? Can you see from where you stand the head of that terrible weapon?"

"Yes, Morris; I see it all."

"Who could have done it, Mr. Carter?"

"We cannot tell that now, Morris."

"He is dead, isn't he, Mr. Carter? We cannot bring him to life again, can we? There is nothing to do, is there?"

"No, Morris; there is nothing to do, save that I want you to turn about slowly, and face me. This has been a terrible shock to you, Morris, and you are almost beside yourself with the agony of it. Turn slowly and face me, Morris; then give me your hand and come with me into the next room. Come, Morris."

The valet, as if he were in a dream, and as if the effort to comply with the detective's request were stupendous in its muscular requirements, compelled himself to turn slowly about, and then permitted himself to be led into the adjoining room, where the detective closed the door, and then stepped quickly across to a sideboard, where there was a decanter of brandy; but even then he was not quick enough, for before he reached it he heard a crash behind him, and he turned just in time to see Morris pitch headlong upon the floor in a dead faint.

It was a consequence of the reaction that had come upon the valet with the knowledge that assistance was at hand in his terrible dilemma. He might have stood for hours before the dead body of his master, waiting for some one to come, and still retaining a semblance of consciousness, but with the arrival of the detective upon the scene, and the consequent knowledge that his own responsibility was at an end, had come the reaction.

But for Nick Carter's understanding of the circumstances, and the delicate manner in which he had spoken to Morris, the collapse would have occurred instantly; as it was, the detective had hoped to avoid it, although he plainly saw it coming.

Now, when Morris fell, Nick lifted him from the floor, and placed him upon a couch. Then he bathed his temples and forehead with some of the brandy, while he managed to make Morris swallow a little of it, and then he stood beside him, looking down upon him, while he waited for consciousness to return.

It came slowly, but after a little the valet opened his eyes, and smiled wanly.

"Some one entered the room while I was gone after Mr. Sturtevant's breakfast," he explained slowly, without waiting for a question to be asked. "I left him in the chair where you found him. I don't think he moved while I was gone. That is all I know about it, Mr. Carter."

"Yes, Morris," said Nick; "I will have some questions to ask you presently, but in the meantime I want you to promise me to remain where you are, without moving, until I return to you. Here, swallow another spoonful of this brandy, and then do as I ask, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am going back into the next room." Nick left him then, and returned to the body of Roger Sturtevant.

His first care upon reentering the room was to search it with his eyes thoroughly, for it is almost inevitable that a stranger, upon entering and leaving a room, as this murderer had been obliged to do, must move something, or drop something, or leave behind him or her some trace of the intruder's presence there.

It appeared from the examination the detective had already been able to make that the hatpin with which the crime had been committed was the only thing that the murderer had left; but now, as the detective searched more minutely with his eyes, he saw, lying upon the carpet, half-way between the door and the chair, a gilt hairpin, like those that are affected by peroxide blonds, or by women with natural golden hair.

And that was absolutely the only indication, aside from the crime itself, and the instrument with which it had been committed, that another person had been there.

There was nothing about the body, or the room, to afford any clue whatever to the murderer, and there was certainly no advantage to be obtained by the possession of a gilt hairpin, which, to all appearances, was new, and might never have been worn at all.

He dropped the little gilded ornament into his pocket and stepped into the adjoining room to the telephone, where, having called up the management of the hotel, and requested the presence of the man in charge, at Mr. Sturtevant's rooms at once, he then called for and obtained the coroner's number, and made the official notification of the death of Roger Sturtevant.

The manager, when he appeared, was, of course, for having the body removed from the hotel instantly, and it was difficult to convince him that it was impossible to do so until the coroner had viewed it, and had given his permission; but, inasmuch as the coroner had announced that it would be an hour before he could arrive at the hotel, there was nothing for the manager to do in the meanwhile but to maintain that sphinxlike silence that hotel proprietors always assume in cases of the kind.

Alone again, and while awaiting the arrival of the coroner, the detective turned his attention to the valet, who had now entirely recovered, and had moved over to a chair near the window, where he remained, a picture of abject misery over his sudden bereavement.

"Morris," said Nick, "I want, first, to congratulate you upon your conduct in this matter. Very few men would have acted as you have done. Furthermore, Morris, I want you to help me, as far as it is in your power, to discover the man, or the woman, who has committed this deed."

"I will certainly do that, sir, but I don't know of anything that I can do, or of any suggestion that I can make."

"I understand that perfectly well, Morris, but in a position of this kind people often know a great deal that they are not aware of. You probably have knowledge within you of certain points which bear relation to this crime, about which you realize nothing at all. However, we will come to that presently."

"It must have been a woman, was it not, Mr. Carter?" Morris asked.

The detective smiled, as he replied slowly:

"It may have been a woman, Morris, or it may have been a chimpanzee, as in Poe's story of 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue.' The hatpin, and also a hairpin that I found, would indicate that the crime was committed by a woman, but I am rather inclined to think that the hatpin was used, and the hairpin was dropped purposely, to create that impression; however, this is all merely surmise on my part, now."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

The coroner put in his appearance very much sooner than he was expected, and so interrupted the detective before he could continue with his questioning of Morris; and the two, leaving the valet in the outer room, proceeded to the scene of the crime together.

In a case of this kind there is little or nothing for the coroner to do, beyond giving his consent to the removal of the body, and making an official announcement on a blank he is obliged to fill out, stating the cause of death; and these two things were quickly attended to.

Death had resulted from the stab of a hatpin which had pierced the heart at about its center, probably causing instant death. The crime had been committed by a person unknown; it could not have been suicide, and was, therefore, murder. That summed up the statements made in the blank, which the coroner filled out and signed, and forwarded to the Bureau of Vital Statistics. The police of the precinct were, of course, summoned, and the matter was officially given over to their charge for further investigation.

The hatpin—the cause of death—was also relinquished to the police by the detective, after he had examined it. He found only that it was a steel pin of unusual strength, nine inches in length from the point to the jet head, and that the latter was octagonal in shape, with facets that glistened almost like a diamond; and in size it had a little less than the circumference of a silver quarter.

With the announcement to the police of the finding of the body and the crime that had been committed, there came at once the usual rush of reporters from the newspapers, and to them Nick devoted his attention for the next half-hour, for, because of reasons of his own, he wished that his own version of the affair—or, at least, what would seem to be his version of it—to appear in the papers.

His statement to the first reporter who applied to him, and which embodied all that appeared in any of the papers, was, in substance, as follows:

"Roger Sturtevant was stabbed to death by a hatpin, between the hours of eight and nine o'clock this morning, in the dressing-room of his own apartment, which he has occupied for several years, at the Hotel Caligula.

"His valet, Jackson Morris, had prepared his master's bath, roused him from sleep, and helped him on with his bathrobe, and then left him to go below in the hotel to prepare Mr. Sturtevant's breakfast, which he was in the habit of attending to personally.

"Mr. Sturtevant, after putting on the bathrobe, feeling still somewhat drowsy, tied the cord about his waist and dropped into a sleepy-hollow chair near one of the windows of the room, and there the valet left him when he went below to attend to the matter of breakfast.

"The valet was absent from the room, approximately, three-quarters of an hour, he doesn't know exactly, and it might have been a little more, or a little less, but, in effect, the time stated is correct.

"He returned with the breakfast on a tray, tapped at the door of the dressing-room, entered it, and saw that Mr. Sturtevant was still seated in the chair, and had not gone to his bath. The valet, supposing him to be sleeping, went quietly about the room, arranging the table for the breakfast-things, and, when they were ready, attempted to rouse his master, and so discovered that a crime had been committed. He then telephoned for me, and, while awaiting my arrival, did nothing and disturbed nothing in the room more than he had already done in arranging Mr. Sturtevant's breakfast for him.

"When I arrived I found Mr. Sturtevant seated in the sleepy-hollow chair by the window. He wore no garment whatever, save the bathrobe, which was open from the throat half-way to his waist. His feet had been thrust into a pair of heelless, grass slippers. He had been stabbed to death through the heart with a hatpin.

"The murderer had evidently entered the room very soon after the departure from it of the valet, and might have been, and probably was, watching in the corridor for that very event to happen. This would indicate that the person who committed the deed was more or less familiar with Mr. Sturtevant's habits.

"The murderer left no trace whatever of identity, or

even of sex, unless we suppose that the hatpin and a gilt hairpin, that I found on the floor, later, were indications of the latter.

"Mr. Sturtevant was evidently struck from behind, by the murderer reaching over his head, where he reclined in the sleepy-hollow chair, and it is doubtful if he had any idea of the presence of another person in the room with him, up to the instant he was struck.

"It is presumed that he died instantly, and was totally unaware of his danger.

"You may say that there is no possibility of entertaining the idea of suicide in this matter. It was plainly a deliberately and carefully planned murder, and may have been committed by a man who desired to give the impression that it was done by a woman, or may, in fact, have been actually committed by a woman.

"Beyond this, I can venture no conjecture or surmise for the newspapers."

With a statement like this, authorized by Nick Carter himself, as coming from himself, there was little left for the reporters to do, beyond their usual activity in investigating antecedents, and in searching for possible enemies who might have committed the act; but, inasmuch as the papers only recently had contained extensive accounts concerning Roger Sturtevant and his experiences with the "haunted house" mystery at the upper end of Manhattan Island,* there was very little that was new in the way of information to be obtained concerning him.

Nevertheless, the evening papers contained columns about the murder. The manager of the hotel had been interviewed; almost everybody who had an intimate acquaintance with Sturtevant had been seen, and had made some statement concerning the crime, and every paper was filled with repertorial conjectures concerning it, while the consensus of opinion among them was to the effect that undoubtedly the criminal was a woman who had either a fancied or a real cause for enmity and vengeance against the victim.

And this was the impression that the detective had endeavored to convey.

He knew that by giving out the idea that the criminal might have been a woman, but, also, that he was himself slow to accept that theory, he only convinced the reporters that it really was his theory, which he was endeavoring to conceal; and they made the most of it.

It was past noon when the detective finally had an opportunity to converse uninterruptedly with Morris, and even then he took him away from the hotel and to the privacy of his own house and study.

"Now, Morris," he said, when at last they were alone, "we must begin with the last time I saw you and your master, together. That was the day following our experiences in the haunted house, and that was two weeks ago yesterday, as I remember it."

"Yes, sir," said Morris; "two weeks ago yesterday."

"Mr. Sturtevant told me that he was going out of town almost at once, as soon as he had given directions about the work he wanted done on the house. Now, did you go away with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you go?"

"We went to Boston, where Mr. Sturtevant's yacht was at anchor, and we came around on her to New York; that is all."

"Do you know, Morris, if Mr. Sturtevant had any idea that his life was in danger?"

"I do not think he had. He never mentioned the subject to me."

"Has he acted at any time as though he had such an idea?"

"No, sir."

"Has he received any letter of a threatening nature?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Or any letter or message, at all, which seemed to annoy him?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"How long is it since you returned to your rooms at the Caligula?"

"Four days ago, sir. Last night was the fourth night we were there."

"Who has been to call upon your master at his rooms since your return there? I wish you to mention each one, beginning at the time of your return."

Morris was silent for several moments, during which he thought deeply, and then he replied:

"I can remember only three who have called during that time; but you must understand, Mr. Carter, that I have not been at the rooms constantly. I have been out from time to time, on errands for Mr. Sturtevant, and it is possible that people may have been to see him at such times."

"Who are the three, Morris?"

"There is Mr. Congdon, whom you know; Sir Charles Graycourt, who is one of Mr. Sturtevant's English friends; and there was a stranger, by the name of Ledyard, who was not a gentleman, but who came with a message, which I carried in to Mr. Sturtevant. I waited while he read it, and he told me to say that there was no answer. I conveyed the message to the man, Ledyard, who shrugged his shoulders, and went away without making any comment at all."

"Did your master say anything to you about the message, or its contents, after the messenger had departed?"

"No, sir."

"What did he do with the note or letter than you delivered to him?"

"He tore it up and threw it into the waste-basket. I

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 565.

saw him do that; and it was carried out, and, of course, burned the following morning, when the rooms were cared for."

"Was the man Ledyard one whom you had ever seen before?"

"No, sir."

"Did his face or his manner give you any suggestion of any of the people who were mixed up in the affair of the haunted house?"

"No, sir; I had no impression about him, whatever, other than that he was a mere messenger for a third person."

"What was the manner of Mr. Sturtevant when he read that message that was brought to him?"

"Precisely the same as usual, Mr. Carter. He read what it contained, shrugged his shoulders, lighted a cigarette, thought a moment, and then directed me to tell the messenger that there would be no answer. While he sat there he tore the letter into small bits, threw them into the waste-basket, and resumed the reading of a paper that was before him."

"When was that, Morris?"

"That, sir, happened about five o'clock in the afternoon of the day before yesterday."

"I think, Morris," said the detective slowly, "that if we can trace the origin of that message we will find that it has some relation to the crime that has been committed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST.

It must not be supposed that Nick Carter had intentionally neglected the very apparent necessity of making extensive inquiries at the hotel itself, concerning persons who had entered or left the building at or near the time when the crime was committed.

He had postponed that part of his investigation purposely, and for obvious reasons, for it had been his experience on former occasions that when he went at once about such inquiries there was very little information obtainable.

People who were questioned at such times were invariably so anxious to impart information which was rarely correct, or, at least, was so distorted by their natural eagerness to know more than they really did, that it was apt to prove worthless.

On the other hand, he realized that if he left the employees of the hotel to themselves for a few hours, or for a day, they would discuss it among themselves, particularly after reading what was published in the papers, and that they would have had sufficient leisure, as well as ample incentive to have recalled by that time anything of pertinence relative to the affair, of which they might have knowledge. Nick Carter was and is a great believer in what he calls "circumstantial affinity of incident," by which he may be understood to mean that if a person supposedly having knowledge of an event is approached concerning that incident at about the same time of day, and under practically the same conditions that surround the incident itself, he will recollect more perfectly, whatever happened to impress him twenty-four hours previously.

It was the next morning, therefore, at eight o'clock, when Nick appeared at the hotel without announcement, and walked directly to the desk, where he addressed himself to the clerk who was in charge.

"You know me, of course," he said.

"Certainly, Mr. Carter," was the reply.

"Were you on duty yesterday morning, at this hour?"

"I was, sir. I came on at six o'clock, and remained until twelve. I then went off——"

"Never mind what time you went off duty. I merely want to know some particulars, which I think you can describe to me, concerning what may have happened between the hours of seven and half-past eight yesterday morning."

"You mean just before the murder was committed, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, I mean just before it; also during the time it may have been committed, and possibly a short time following upon the actual commission of the crime."

"Do you want me to tell you what happened here in the office at that time?"

"No. I merely want you to answer the questions I shall ask you."

"Very well, sir. I shall do that, certainly."

"You came on duty at six, you say?"

"I did."

"Who was here in the office at that time?"

"Do you mean behind the desk, Mr. Carter?"

"I mean exactly what I said. Who was here in the office at that time?"

"Why, there was Conover, the clerk whom I relieved; there was his assistant, who acts as key-clerk during the night trick; there were the hall-boys, those who were going off duty, and those who were coming on duty; two porters—and I think that is all."

"There were no guests of the hotel present in the office at that time?"

"No, sir."

"Are you quite sure about that?"

"Positive. The office was empty, save for those whom I mentioned."

"And those who were relieved from duty at that time left very soon, I suppose?"

"Within five or ten minutes; yes, sir."

"Now, who was the next person to appear in the office; and in that question I am not referring to employees,

but to guests of the hotel, or to strangers who might have entered it at that time?"

"Why, I couldn't answer that question very well, Mr. Carter. I was busy inside the office, and I am conscious of the fact that several people came in and passed out; and it is not my habit to notice such persons, unless they come to the desk for one reason or another."

"Very good. Tell me the first person whom you noticed."

"Why, the first person whom I remember entered with a satchel, came to the desk, and registered. I assigned him to room 110, I think."

"Is he here yet?"

The clerk turned to the room-board, in which the slips are placed against the numbers of the rooms occupied, and replied:

"No, sir; the room has been given up."

"Did you at any time see any person loitering about the hall yesterday morning whom you did not know?"

"I don't remember to have noticed any."

"Do you know of any one who was not familiar to you passing through the office, and going to the elevator, between the hours I have mentioned?"

"I remember when you came in, Mr. Carter. I didn't know you then, but I saw you enter. I saw you go straight to the elevator, but you did it in such a direct manner, and with so much assurance, that it did not occur to me to stop you, or even have you followed."

"That is a good answer," said Nick. "Now, did any one else do the same thing, any one who made the same impression upon you?"

"No, sir."

"Were there any other early arrivals? I mean before half-past seven, who registered and were assigned rooms?"

"No, sir; there was only that one I have mentioned, up to nine o'clock and after."

"What was the name of the man who registered, and to whom you assigned room 110?"

The clerk turned back a page of the register, glanced along it, and then replied:

"The name of the registry-book is C. B. Ledyard."

The identity of that name with the name of the person who had brought the message for Sturtevant to the hotel, as described by the valet, rather startled the detective for a moment, notwithstanding the fact that a person who had come there for the purpose of committing a crime would not have been likely to make use of a name that had been given before, and at a time when his personal appearance might have been described. However, he said to the clerk:

"Give me a description of the man who registered as 'C. B. Ledyard.'"

"He was tall, dark, rather handsome, apparently between thirty and forty years old, well-dressed, and he carried an expensive Gladstone bag, which he placed on the floor beside him while he signed his name to the register. He requested a room and bath, and, I remember now, his saying that he preferred to pay for it in advance, as he might wish to leave at a moment's notice."

"Do you remember that you saw him again after that?" asked the detective.

"No; I don't remember that I saw him at all after that."

"You say that he was dark and handsome. Did he wear any beard?"

"No. He was clean shaven."

"Was there anything about him, a characteristic, or a mannerism, or a peculiarity of address, that attracted your notice?"

"No, sir; no more than any other guest."

"Can you remember that you ever saw him in this hotel before that time?"

"No. His face was new to me."

"Who was on duty here at five o'clock on the afternoon of the day before yesterday?"

"At five o'clock of the day before yesterday," the clerk repeated after the detective, and then he added: "I think I was on duty myself at that time. I remember to have relieved the other clerk from four to six."

"Very good," said Nick. "I have reason to believe that this man, Ledyard, visited this hotel at or near five in the afternoon of the day before yesterday; that he brought with him a letter, which he delivered at the rooms of Mr. Sturtevant. Now, do you remember, or, rather, can you not remember having seen the same man at that time?"

"No, sir. I am positive that I did not."

"Nevertheless, he was here—or, at least, there was a man here who gave the name of Ledyard to Mr. Sturtevant's valet."

"In that case, sir, he must have passed me without my noticing him."

"Who was the boy who conducted Ledyard to his room after he registered here?"

"I think it was Number 7?"

"Is he on duty now?"

"He should be."

"Call him, if you please, and let me talk with him."

The hall-boy, who bore the distinguishing number, 7, on the lapel of his coat, appeared presently, and the detective drew him aside.

"Do you remember taking a gentleman to room 110 yesterday morning, about seven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Describe him to me, so that I may know that there is no mistake."

"He was tall, sir, six feet, I should say, dark-complexioned, and he had a black leather Gladstone bag."

"Do you remember to have seen him again after you took him to the room?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him go through the office, and pass out upon the street about nine o'clock, I think it was."

"Did you notice if he carried his satchel with him, then?"

"I don't think he did, sir, but I am not sure."

"When you conducted him to the room, did he ask you any questions, or say or do anything that you remember about him?"

"Yes, sir. He asked me how long I had worked in the house, and if I liked my job; then he told me to bring him a pitcher of ice-water, and when I had done that he gave me a tip, and asked me if there was a gentleman stopping here by the name of Sturtevant."

"What answer did you make to that question?"

"I told him yes, sir, of course; that Mr. Sturtevant had lived here ever since I had been in the hotel, and I thought a long time before that. Then he asked me what rooms Mr. Sturtevant occupied, and I told him."

"You told him, I suppose, what the room number was, and how it might be found?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that was all?"

"Yes, sir."

Nick dismissed the hall-boy, and returned to the clerk at the desk.

"Look on your register, clerk," he said to him, "and tell me if room 110 has been occupied since Ledyard had it."

"No, Mr. Carter, it has not."

"Then be good enough to let me have the key for a moment. I would like to look in the room."

The detective went alone on this small tour of investigation, and the first thing he noticed when he opened the door of the room was the satchel that had already been twice described to him, where it rested upon a chair, near one of the windows. There was no other evidences of occupancy in the room, or, in fact, that it had been occupied at all; but the satchel was there evidently where it had been deposited and left by Ledyard himself, and without hesitation the detective approached it, and, pressing the spring, threw it open. It contained three cheap paper-covered novels and a couple of newspapers, which had been crammed negligently into it. There was nothing else.

Crossing the room to the telephone, Nick called for the chambermaid who had charge of that room to be sent to him at once, and then he waited patiently until she appeared.

"You have charge of this room?" he asked her when she came.

"Yes, sir."

"Was it occupied last night?"

"No, sir. It has not been disturbed at all. A gentleman came to it yesterday morning, and brought that satchel with him, but he went out very soon afterward."

"Did you see the man?" asked Nick.

"I happened to see him; yes, sir; when Number 7 brought him up-stairs, and a little while afterward I passed him on the stairway as I was going down."

"Do you mean from the floor above?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he say anything to you at that time?"

"No, sir."

The detective dismissed her with a small fee, and once more inspected the satchel, but beyond the fact that it was new, and that it contained nothing more than has already been described, there was nothing of interest about it. It was evident to the detective that it had been purchased and brought to the hotel merely to be left behind, as it had been, and in order to give its possessor the appearance of having just arrived in the city. This discovery, taken in connection with the fact that Sturtevant's rooms happened to be on the second floor above this one, and that the chambermaid had seen Ledyard ascending from this floor, was significant.

But although the detective spent another hour among the employees and servants of the hotel, asking questions diligently, he could find no further trace of the man than has already been described.

It was apparent to the detective that he had come there for the very purpose that he had accomplished; that is, to commit the crime of which Roger Sturtevant had been the victim; but he had come and gone so quietly, he had carried out his purpose so expeditiously, and he had committed the deed so expertly, that there was no clue to his identity, and it was almost without hope of tracing him at all that the detective finally withdrew from the hotel altogether and returned to his own house.

He was convinced that the only method that he could employ to search for this criminal—the only method which offered any promise of success—consisted in searching backward along the lines of Sturtevant's career, especially in investigating anew the incidents with which Sturtevant had been associated in relation to the one time mystery of the haunted house. The detective recalled the conspiracy between the Stantons, father and son, and their adherents and followers, by which they had sought to defraud Sturtevant of a great deal of money, and because of which, and their failure to accomplish their design, they might seek revenge upon him. It seemed incredible, however, that they should go to the extent of committing a murder for a reason so small as this one, and while the detective believed that a connection between the two might be traced out, nevertheless there was a greater and a deeper motive for this present crime than any that could have grown out of that other case he had had for Roger Sturtevant.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF STURTEVANT'S BODY.

Roger Sturtevant had always maintained a country place, which he called home, although he remained there but little. It was too far from town to please him. He had been in the habit of saying, in reference to it, that he liked to be where he could see the lights in the city streets, and hear the whistles blow; at all events, although he maintained a corps of servants there, and kept open house, although he frequently took out "week-end" parties, he never remained there unless the old house was thronged with company.

It was to "The Larches," however, that his body was taken as soon as the undertaker had prepared it for removal—and there Nick Carter followed it late in the afternoon of the day succeeding the commission of the crime.

Sturtevant was practically alone in the world. He was neither blessed, nor cursed, with relatives. His great fortune had come to him because he was the last of his race, and was the only one left to inherit.

But Roger Sturtevant had always been a lovable fellow. He had hosts of friends, and there were many to mourn his sudden taking off. Moreover, his servants had always been devoted to him, regarding him as much as a friend as a master.

And Nick Carter felt that it was his own particular duty, under the circumstances, to act the part of nearest friend under the existing conditions. There would be hundreds of friends ready at hand to mourn for him—many who would actually mourn, but there would be none among them to take the lead, and so Nick Carter decided that he would quietly usurp that position himself.

The distance to The Larches was not great. In an automobile, it was a short spurt from the city, and the place itself, when one arrived there, was a large estate, the greater portion of which had been transformed into a beautiful private park, in the very center of which the mansion was located.

The detective had lately purchased a high-power runabout, in which, with Patsy, he set out for The Larches at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, having calculated that he could make the run in approximately two hours; and it was, in fact, a quarter to seven o'clock in the evening when they came to a halt at the end of the winding driveway, in front of the beautiful house, erected in the style of a French château of the Louis XVIII. period.

Nick had thought, from a distance, that some unusual excitement was stirring the people who were already at the house, for he had been able to obtain glimpses of the broad piazza at the front through the trees as they approached.

He had seen that figures were running about, evidently in consternation about something, so, when he pulled his machine to a stop under the porte-cochere, and Morris dashed through the front door of the house toward him with a loud cry of welcome, the detective was not as greatly astonished as otherwise he might have been at this unusual proceeding on the part of a servant.

"Mr. Carter! Mr. Carter! Thank Heaven, you have come!" was the cry of Morris, when he saw and recognized the detective; and then, as the detective got down upon the ground, many of the guests who were already there came forward, and grouped themselves around him, and upon the face of all there were expressions of fright, alarm, dismay, terror, or incredulity, according to the characteristics of that particular person.

Also, it seemed as if every one of them tried to address Nick Carter at the same time, as if each regarded his or her own particular version of the story that was to be told as the best and most lucid; and, of course, with the result that Nick could determine nothing, or next to nothing, from that babel of tongues.

And as they crowded more closely around him, gesticulating, and all endeavoring to talk at the same moment, he realized that it must be some time before he could hope to get a lucid idea of what had happened, if he remained where he was, under such conditions, and he, therefore, wheeled sharply upon Patsy, who had descended to the roadway beside him, and said:

"Attend to these people, Patsy, and get what you can out of them. I will be back presently."

With that he reached out and seized Morris, who happened to be nearest to him; he lifted the valet from his feet, and tossed him bodily into the seat that Patsy had occupied in the automobile; and then, springing under the steering-wheel himself, he shot away from the group like an arrow, and in a minute was far out of hearing of any of them.

He knew that they gazed after him in utter amazement, and were, perhaps, for a moment, silent in their astonishment; but he cared nothing for that, and he permitted the machine to glide rapidly along the winding road until he was out of sight and hearing from the house, and then he brought it to a halt again.

"Now, Morris," he said sternly, "tell me, what in the world is the matter? I gathered from that medley of voices merely that the body of Mr. Sturtevant has disappeared. Is that the case, Morris?"

"Yes, sir. You see, sir——"

"Now, Morris, wait. If I permit you to tell me about this matter in your own way we shall never get at the facts I wish to know, so I will ask you to confine yourself to answering the questions I ask you—and you need offer no explanations as you answer, unless I shall ask you for them."

"Yes, sir."

"You understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"Now, what has happened?"

"My master's body has disappeared," replied Morris succinctly, and stopping entirely at the end of that terse statement.

"Since when?"

"I do not know that, sir."

"When did you discover that the body was missing?"

"Not more than fifteen minutes ago, sir."

"Who discovered the fact?"

"Clawson; he is one of the footmen."

"Who was the first person to whom he announced his discovery?"

"He shouted it out to the whole lot, sir. He yelled it out like a madman. He was scared stiff, sir, and he rushed out upon the piazza, and cried it out."

"Where were you at the time?"

"I happened to be approaching the doorway where he stood, from the far end of the piazza."

"And what did you do?"

"I rushed forward, and tried to hush him up; but it was no use. The news was out, and the whole lot of them were excited. They gathered around Clawson and began to question him, and others came running from every direction—and then you appeared."

"How does it happen that it was Clawson who made the discovery?"

"He went to the room—the room where the body was lying, sir—for something."

"Who was the last person to see the body—to your own knowledge—before its disappearance?"

"I think I was, sir."

"How long ago was that, Morris?"

"At a quarter to six, sir."

The detective looked at his watch.

"It is now just seven," he said. "It was then, just an hour before my arrival here, that you saw the body yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are not aware that any other person visited the room where it was lying, between the time when you saw it and when Clawson discovered that it was missing?"

"No, sir."

"You have not, of course, been inside the room since you heard that it had disappeared?"

"No, sir."

"We can trust Patsy to keep those people out of it until I get back there. Now, Morris, do you personally know all those people who are there?"

"No, sir. There are several among them whom I do not know at all; there are others who are known to me only by sight; and there has been a lot of strangers who have called during the afternoon."

"But many of the people who are there *are* known to you, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose that all have been informed that the funeral was to take place to-morrow, at ten?"

"Yes."

"Have any of them announced that they would like to remain over night?"

"Some of the nearest friends of Mr. Sturtevant have done so."

"In which room was the body lying, Morris?"

"In the large drawing-room, sir. I prepared it myself. I knew that a great many people were likely to attend the funeral, and that many would wish to view the remains, and so I selected that room. The casket is at the east end of the room, sir."

"You darkened the windows and closed the doors to that room, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; and fastened them, too. That is, I left some of the windows raised somewhat, for ventilation, but I closed the shutters outside of them. And the doors I closed and locked."

"All of them?"

"Yes, sir. They were all locked on the inside, with the keys left in the door, save the one that opens from the library. In that door I merely turned the key on the outside and left the key in the lock. It was probably by that door that Clawson entered. In fact, it must have been, for the other doors were locked on the inside."

"At least you left them so, eh?"

"Yes."

"As a matter of fact," said the detective, smiling, "we do not know positively that the body has disappeared, at all. We have only Clawson's word for it. It is barely possible that he may have been deceived."

"I don't think so, sir. I don't see how he could have been deceived about such a matter."

"No, it doesn't seem likely. Is Clawson a trustworthy person, Morris?"

"Yes, sir. Quite so. He is rather stupid, I think, but honest. He has been with Mr. Sturtevant a long time. He was a stable-boy formerly, and was gradually promoted until he is now a footman."

"What time last evening did you arrive here with the body?"

"It was about this hour, sir, a little after seven. It was not yet dark, or near it; in fact, I think it was about this time, although I did not notice exactly."

"Who was here then?"

"Only the servants, sir, and the persons who accompanied me."

"Who were they? Who did accompany you here, Morris?"

"There was the undertaker and two of his assistants; there was Mr. Belmar, who was Mr. Sturtevant's

lawyer—and he had one of his clerks with him; and, save for the drivers and chauffeurs, that is all. Only I forgot to mention that there were two automobiles which came along inside the grounds with us when we arrived. They joined us on the way."

"Who were in those automobiles, Morris?"

"They were strangers to me, sir, but they made themselves known to me as soon as we were at the house. They announced themselves as friends of Mr. Sturtevant's, and asked if they might see the remains as soon as I could permit them to do so. Of course, I gave my consent to that. There seemed to be no reason why I should not do so."

"Quite right, Morris. But I think I will ask you, presently, more about those strangers."

"Yes, sir; although I can tell you no more about them than I have already done."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARKS ON THE SAND.

The detective, however, deferred his further questioning of Morris until later, for now he was not only anxious to return to the house where the guests were assembled, but he also wished as soon as possible to view the drawing-room from which the body was reported to have been taken.

Arriving again at the porte-cochère, he found Patsy awaiting him, twirling a key in his hand, while the guests who a little while before had grouped themselves so eagerly about the detective were now either seated around the piazza, or standing in knots about it, discussing with considerable animation, but also in subdued voices, the unprecedented incident that had occurred.

The detective saw the key in Patsy's hand, and knew by the attitude that the young assistant had already locked the door of the drawing-room against the admission of others until Nick Carter had viewed the interior, and, shutting off the power of his machine, he nodded to his assistant, and, by a gesture, bade him follow, and so passed on into the house without so much as a glance toward the other people on the piazza.

The detective stepped aside while Patsy unlocked the door, and then, knowing that his assistant had followed him into the room, he paused just across the threshold, studying with just his usual care the plan of the unusually large room. It formed an oblong square, that was almost as wide as it was long, and there were many doors communicating with it. There were two into the wide hall of the house; there was the one into the library, by which they had entered; there were two which opened upon a wide veranda, along the south side of the house, and there was one other, a very extensive double door, which communicated with a conservatory at the eastern end of the room. These doors, as Morris had explained to the detective, were each one locked on the inside with keys that still remained in their respective locks, save that one from the library. This had been locked on the outside, but without any one trying to extract the key from the door save when Patsy had taken possession of it after their arrival, and, therefore, after the disappearance of the body.

The casket rested upon benches near the eastern end of the room, and, therefore, directly in front of the doors which communicated with the conservatory. Morris, in arranging the room, had moved the table and other articles of furniture which had occupied the middle portion of the apartment back against the wall, and had also placed the chairs against the walls, so that now the drawing-room presented more of the appearance of a hall or auditorium than what it was.

After gazing a moment about him, the detective stepped forward swiftly and looked into the casket, which was now empty. Then he passed from it to the conservatory door, tried it, and saw that it was still fastened, removed the key from it, and examined it critically, and then returned it to its place.

He then passed to the first of the two doors which opened upon the veranda at the south side of the room, and here, when he withdrew the key, he nodded significantly, and passed it along to Patsy, who, after one glance, also nodded his head, and returned it to the detective. There were little bright marks about the end of the plunger of the key, indicating plainly where burglar's forceps had bit into it, in order to turn it from outside the door, and there was no need for the detective to examine further than that point to determine by what means the body had been taken from the room.

When Nick received the key back again he returned it to the lock and opened the door, and the two stepped outside upon the veranda, which was situated behind an L-shaped projection of the main house, so that it was entirely sheltered from view from the front of the mansion. Directly in front of the veranda the grounds were laid out beautifully in a sort of private flower-garden, which sloped down to a pond, which was, perhaps, a quarter of a mile in diameter, and this garden was sheltered on either side by a high and thick hedge, which also ran from the house to the pond at oblique angles, not unlike the outside strokes of the capital letter W. At the pond, and fronting upon it, was a boat-house, of Japanese design, and three boats were moored at the wharf which surrounded it. The lawn, which was dotted with beautifully designed beds of flowers, had been lately trimmed with the mower, so that it looked now, with the flower-beds upon it, like a piece of green brocaded velvet, stretching away from the mansion to the little body of water, whereon half a dozen swans were lazily swimming about with much more activity and energy than

these large and lazy birds are in the habit of employing.

More than that, they were following a leader, which swans never do in the water, save when they have been disturbed and agitated; as a rule, they float about aimlessly, with only an occasional stroke of one of their webbed feet. Nick watched them for some time in silence, and Patsy did the same, for he also was attracted by their actions, the more so since he noticed that his chief was studying them.

Although they still clung to their leader, and followed him in single file, or in any way he chose to lead them, they swam aimlessly, and the detective knew, therefore, that he had come upon them at the time when their excitement was about over, and when they had almost forgotten the cause of their disturbance.

He devoted a moment or two to an examination of the grassy lawn before him, and then, perceiving nothing to interest him there, he led the way swiftly to the boat-house, and cast off the painter of one of the little craft, while he motioned for Patsy to occupy a seat at the stern of it. With two strokes he sent the boat shooting out across the water, and then permitted it to drift while he still watched the swans, which were now eagerly upon the alert again, with their heads raised high and their little eyes gleaming brightly at this new interruption of their quiet.

And Nick permitted the boat to drift for a long time, while he watched them as they gradually became reassured, and resumed their previous attitude. Once Patsy started to speak, but Nick motioned to him to be silent, while he occasionally dipped an oar into the water, moving the boat, and directing it so that he followed the birds in their movements.

Swans are curious creatures and intensely interesting to one who studies them, and Nick knew that if he were patient and waited while he watched them they would presently direct him to the spot on the opposite bank of the pond, near where the cause of the previous disturbance had disappeared.

And this they did in the following manner:

They swam about with apparent aimlessness, gradually approaching nearer and nearer to a certain spot in the bank, and then, when at last they were within a few inches of it, the leader turned suddenly, and swam swiftly toward the center of the pond again, followed, in Indian-file, by each of his companions.

And this is characteristic of the swan; that, having perceived what he appears to regard as danger, he will approach it, time after time, in a roundabout and apparently aimless fashion, until he is as close to it as he dares to go, when, suddenly, he will turn and sail in a direct course straight away from it.

For the detective to have examined in detail the circumference of that pond would have consumed more time than was at his disposal, for dusk was already upon them, and presently it would be quite dark; but now, with the spot he wished to find so definitely pointed out to him by the actions of the swans, he sent the boat swiftly to the shore, and grounded it upon the narrow beach, within six feet of where another boat had been partly drawn out upon the sand, and where the scraping of its keel and the moisture that had dropped from it was still plainly visible.

There were, also, other marks upon that narrow strip of sand, marks which some one had evidently been at much pains to obliterate, for, while there were no footprints, there were plainly indicated evidences that there had been such.

But it was evident that the person who had returned the boat to the wharf at the opposite side of the pond had used an oar, or bit of wood, to scratch out the impressions of footprints, which otherwise would have been left in the sandy shore.

It was now too dark to search any farther, and so Nick and Patsy returned to the boat, and rowed silently across the little lake again to the wharf.

"There was a confederate in the house with those body-snatchers, Patsy," the detective said to his assistant, "and without doubt he is still there. It was he who returned the boat to the wharf, and who scratched out the marks of footprints over at the other side of the pond."

Patsy merely nodded; there was no reply for him to make, and so the two returned by the way they had come, and, having locked the door of the drawing-room on the inside, they passed through it, and presently went outside on the front piazza again by the way they had come, leaving no one the wiser for their short expedition across the pond at the south side of the house. Nick Carter regretted that his character as a detective was known to the people who were assembled there, although he had no doubt now that the confederate who had assisted in the taking of Sturtevant's body from the house had already gone away.

And he did find, upon his return, that more than half the people who had been there when he arrived had gone, and that there were really only seven guests who had determined to remain at The Larches for the night, in order to be present at the funeral services in the morning, if the body should be recovered. As they stepped out upon the piazza, Patsy reached out a retentive hand, and pulled his chief to one side.

"Do you suppose?" he asked in a low tone so that others might not hear him, "that the body-stealers might have weighted it and sunk it in the pond?"

"No," replied the detective, "I thought of that at first, but I have dismissed the idea."

"I had thought of it, too," said Patsy, "and also dismissed it, but just now it occurred to me again."

"Why?" asked Nick.

"Well," said Patsy, "what else would they do with it? What good would it do them to carry it away, and where would they take it?"

Nick smiled at his assistant as he replied:

"Patsy, it isn't likely they took the body with any idea of keeping it very long, and it is important that we should determine as quickly as possible what the reasons were for taking it at all. If it was done merely for revenge against Sturtevant, it's quite likely they would have weighted the body and sunk it in the pond; but if there was another and more definite object in view, as I believe, then there was no time for the body-snatchers to carry out that purpose during the transit across the pond in broad daylight."

"What other purpose could there have been?" asked Patsy.

"That I do not know, lad; that is what we must determine as quickly as possible."

"I have never heard," said Patsy, "of but two supposedly good reasons for stealing a corpse."

"Yes?" said Nick; "What are they?"

"One you have already mentioned; revenge; the other is the very ancient one of stealing a body for the purposes of dissection."

The detective thought a moment.

"The latter of those two surmises," he said presently, "is not probable under the circumstances; the former one may be; but I am inclined to think, lad, that there was another and a deeper purpose in stealing the body of Roger Sturtevant."

"What could it have been?" asked Patsy.

"I am going to question Morris about that very thing, presently," returned the detective, "but just now we will sit down here on the piazza with the others who are here and discuss this unprecedented occurrence while we listen to the theories they may have to advance. It is possible, though hardly probable, that we may pick up some information in that way."

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERY IN INDIA INK.

The night turned out to be a cloudy one and presently a slight drizzling rain began to fall so that the entire party withdrew within doors and disposed themselves variously in the library and sitting-room and the wide and comfortable hall of the house.

These persons who remained there were all known to Nick, if not by sight at least by name, and had all stood in the category of warm friendliness with Roger Sturtevant. They had been more than once entertained at The Larches and considered themselves rather at home there. It was a silent and reserved gathering, too, for all had been shocked by the incident of the afternoon coming as it did upon the sudden and violent death of Sturtevant. Nick Carter knew that if the confederate or accomplice or principal in the latter crime, whoever he might prove to be, had really been at the house when he arrived himself, the man had already disappeared, and that the guests who remained were incapable of offering any suggestion as to the motive for the last outrage and the reason for its commission; and so as soon as it were possible, he drew Morris aside and they sought a room where they could converse alone together.

"Now, Morris," said Nick, smiling at him reassuringly, "you have always been my fund of information concerning the mysteries which have surrounded your master of late; and somewhere in your brain at the present moment exists an explanation of this present riddle."

Morris wagged his head doubtfully trying to return the smile although the effort was a distinct failure.

"You have served Mr. Sturtevant a very long time, have you not, Morris?" the detective asked presently.

"Yes, sir," was the direct reply.

"I have reason to believe that he had entire confidence in you, Morris."

"He did, sir; at least he always said so."

"I can think of three reasons," pursued the detective, "why a body might be stolen as this one was. One of those reasons I must dismiss at the moment I mention it as being extremely improbable in the present instance. The second one I feel I should also dismiss as being unlikely, inadequate and not worth the trouble and risk it would require to accomplish it. The third reason, I shall be obliged to dismiss, Morris, unless you can give me out of your subconscious knowledge some good reason for entertaining it; and now I will name the three in the order in which I have mentioned them."

"Yes, sir."

"The first would be for purposes of dissection, and that is improbable from every point of view. Had Mr. Sturtevant been a great genius, a remarkable crank, or had he possessed unusual brain activity in any given direction, there are specialists who might have wished to secure his brain for examination; but he was merely an ordinary, commonplace, genial, good fellow, not different from a million others save in the one fact that he possessed a fortune which he spent extravagantly. For these reasons I dismiss that theory."

"Yes, sir," said Morris, following the detective's remarks intently.

"The second reason, the one which I dismissed as being unlikely because of its inadequacy and the risks involved, is revenge, and right here, Morris, I ought to say that until the body was stolen I was convinced in my mind that Mr. Sturtevant was murdered in revenge; but the stealing of his body and its mysterious disappearance has convinced me that revenge had nothing to do with this one; so we dismiss that also."

"Yes, sir," Morris repeated again.

"The third and last reason to be entertained—the one which must also be dismissed unless you can supply me with a reason for retaining it, is described in one word, *gain*."

"I don't think I understand what you mean, sir."

"Well, Morris, in order to explain it thoroughly to your understanding, I will carry you back for a moment to our experiences with the haunted house. You know the history of that case as well as I do. You know the people concerned in that conspiracy against Mr. Sturtevant plotted and planned for a year or two before they even attempted to carry it out and that the ultimate purpose of their schemes was, *gain;* that is, they sought to defraud Mr. Sturtevant out of the good part of a million dollars. Now, Morris, nothing could be gained in the way of money by the mere killing of Roger Sturtevant; whoever killed him must have known if any inquiries were made at all, that he was a methodical man in at least one respect, for all the world could have found out with very little inquiry that he had no relatives with whom to leave his money, and had disposed of it by will so that his entire fortune would at his death go to found institutions for the care and education of homeless boys. I know and you know and all the world knows that for years, Mr. Sturtevant has devoted great sums to that sort of charity, and that his will left everything he possessed to trustees for that purpose."

"Yes, sir."

"Therefore, no person could hope to benefit directly by his death—that is by inheritance."

"No, sir, save perhaps myself and some of the other servants, Mr. Sturtevant has told me of bequests to me and to others——"

"Yes, I know all about that, Morris, but those bequests are unimportant and not one of them was large enough to profit any man in killing him."

"That is quite true, sir."

"And now, Morris, by this roundabout method, I have arrived at the question I want to ask you. It is this: Have you ever heard mentioned or have you suspected because of anything you have heard mentioned, that there was any sum of money laid aside anywhere by Mr. Sturtevant for other purposes than I have described; or if there was any sum of money of which he had the care or custody which might have belonged to another or which might not have been disposed of in his will?"

"No, sir; I don't recall any such circumstance."

"Morris, who prepared the body for burial?"

"Why, the undertaker and his assistants did that, sir, but I was present of course. I laid out the clothing that was used——"

"That is what I want to know. Now, Morris, did Mr. Sturtevant ever make any request to you concerning the clothing he should wear at his burial or concerning the care of his body in preparation of that event?"

"No, sir."

"Did he never speak of such things to you?"

"Never directly, sir."

"Well, then, indirectly; did he ever mention the subject at all?"

"Scarcely ever, Mr. Carter, though he sometimes laughingly—jokingly I should call it—referred to some tattoo marks that were on his back between his shoulder-blades. You know, sir, he could not see them unless he stood with his back to a mirror and with another glass in front of him and this he frequently did when returning from his bath."

"I have never heard of that mark," said Nick, instantly on the alert.

"It was two swords crossed with a hand clasping the hilt of each one; the position was as if two men were fencing and underneath the design was the word 'Kismet'."

"Meaning 'fate'," said Nick.

"Yes, sir; he often explained that to me."

"Did he explain why the marks were there?".

"No, sir, and for a very good reason."

"Indeed, and what was that?"

"He did not know."

"Do you mean that the tattooing was done without his consent?"

"Yes, sir," replied Morris, smiling.

"How was that?"

"I think, sir, that he was too young to have given his consent at the time it was done."

"You mean that he did not remember?"

"He had no idea when it was done, sir."

"So I am to understand that the tattooing between his shoulders was performed when he was an infant?"

"Yes, sir, he told me that he hadn't the least idea that the marks were there until he was quite a large boy."

"Did he never make any effort to discover how they came there?"

"I don't know as to that, Mr. Carter, but I do know that he had made no such discovery."

"Tell me in what words he usually referred—jokingly as you say—to those tattoo marks when he stood before a glass with another one in his hand and called attention to them."

"The general thought about the mark, sir, was that it was a mystery that he always carried about with him which he never could rid himself of; which he could never hope to have explained and his joke about the design and the word under it was usually in these words or in some form of words which conveyed the same idea."

"He used to say—for instance it was only a few days before his death that he said to me in referring to the design—'Kismet means fate, Morris, and fate means

death. When I am dead the duel that is forever being waged behind my back may be explained.'"

"Ah!" said the detective, and then he was silent. The crossed swords grasped in two hands had not impressed him until that moment as having represented a duel that had been fought or should have been fought and the idea opened up to him a new realm of thought upon the matter. Presently he asked:

"Did Mr. Sturtevant never talk at length upon the subject of design?"

"Only once that I remember, sir."

"Can you recall what was said at that time; in substance, I mean?"

"I think so."

"Try. . Try to tell me about it as completely as you can do so. I would like to know if possible exactly how he viewed that mysterious design on his body."

"It happened at Carlsbad three years ago," replied Morris thoughtfully. "Mr. Sturtevant had been taking the baths for a fortnight and one day when he returned to his room where I was awaiting him, I noticed that he was quite silent for a long time while he was seated near one of the windows smoking. Presently, without introduction of any kind and in a voice that rather startled me, he exclaimed:

"'Morris, I would give half my fortune, and I don't know but all of it, to know the meaning of that devilish design on my back.' 'Yes, sir,' I replied to him not knowing what else to say. 'I want you to hunt up an artist for me to-day or to-morrow, Morris,' he went on as if continuing the thoughts by which he had been occupied, 'and make an appointment with him no matter what it costs to come here to my rooms and make me an exact copy of those tattoo marks. I want the thing done so that I may study it whenever I feel inclined to do so without being obliged to undress and stand before a mirror. Besides I want a nearer view and a magnifying-glass to make it even more prominent.'

"I told him I would do so and I did; but at the time he continued and explained why he had made the request. He said in substance, this:

"'While I was at the baths, Morris, my attendant referred to that tattoo business in rather an odd way. He remarked first that he had cared for me before; at Aix les-Bains in France. I told him he was mistaken because I had never been to that place in my life. He expressed some surprise and after a minute asked me if I was quite sure that I had never been there. I told him with some impatience that I ought to know whether I had been to the French baths or not. Whereupon he remarked that it was very strange. I asked him why and he said: 'Three years ago I worked there, sir, and I cared for a gentleman who if he was not yourself must have been your double, since he was not only very much like you in form and features but he carried on his back the same design that you have there.'

"'Well, Morris,' continued Mr. Sturtevant, 'I questioned that attendant very closely but all I could find out was what I have already told you. It was sufficient to convince me that somewhere else in the world there is another man, who, whether he looks like me or not, which may be only in the imagination of that attendant, certainly carries that same tattoo design between his shoulder-blades. Morris, I would like to find that man.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER DRAWS ON HIS IMAGINATION.

Nick Carter's regret that Roger Sturtevant had never mentioned the subject of the tattoo marks to him was, of course, useless, but nevertheless quite natural; notwithstanding the intimacy that had endured between them, however, the subject had never been touched upon and until this moment Nick Carter had been as ignorant of it as he had kept his other friends and acquaintances.

But the detective could not doubt that the appearance of the marks upon his back had made a great impression, and a lasting one, upon the mind of Roger Sturtevant.

Knowing the character of the dead man as he did, the detective could understand now how Sturtevant had spent many hours of thought upon the mystery of it, wondering how it came there; wondering why it was there and endeavoring by every means in his power to study out the meaning of it.

The detective remembered that Sturtevant's father had died while Roger was still but little more than a boy; but nevertheless he had been old enough to ask questions concerning the inscription on his back; and the detective knowing that both men were dead beyond a possibility of offering any explanation of the mystery, could only determine that Roger's father had either not known the meaning of it or had utterly refused to reveal it.

But it is almost an axiom that where tattoo marks are placed upon the body of an infant they are put there for purposes of identity, and the mere existence of this fact leads naturally to the further conclusion that identification may some time become necessary either through a mixing up of two infants or because of a lost or stolen identity with which the one infant may be associated.

In this case, however, there were plainly two youngsters in the mystery if the accidental discovery and remarks of the attendant at the baths might be relied upon as indicative of anything at all.

The mere fact that the attendant had seen or believed he had seen a resemblance between the two persons who wore the same identification marks, meant nothing at all, since it was as likely as not that the attendant had seen the resemblance only in the marks themselves and had imagined the rest of it.

Plainly, there was no reliance to be placed upon his statement of facial resemblance although since he was an attendant at a bath he might have believed that he recognized a physical likeness between the two men he had cared for.

But, now, Nick recurred again to Morris' reference to the artist who had been summoned.

"You said a moment ago, Morris," he said, "that you found the artist and took him to Mr. Sturtevant's room."

"Yes, sir."

"Did he make a drawing of the design as Mr. Sturtevant desired him to do?"

"He did."

"Do you know what became of that drawing, afterward?"

"Yes, sir; it was always kept among Mr. Sturtevant's private papers."

"Do you know where it is now?"

"I do, sir. I can get it for you in a few moments."

It is needless to say that the valet was dispatched at once for the drawing and presently returned with it and the description already given suffices for that as well as for the original inscription itself.

Two crossed swords, each grasped in a muscular hand, as if the duelists were facing each other and had just brought their weapons together, was the idea suggested by the drawing, and underneath in script was the word, "Kismet."

"Morris," said the detective, "You told me at the beginning of this conversation, that you had been a very long time in the employ of Mr. Sturtevant. Now, I want to ask you if there is any servant at present in this house who in point of service is a much older employé than yourself."

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "there are two; the housekeeper and the butler."

"And which of those two has been here longer than the other one, Morris?"

"That I do not know."

"I will ask you to go at once and send the butler to me here and when you have done so find the housekeeper and ask her not to retire until after I have seen her to-night."

When the butler appeared a few moments later Nick discovered that he was quite an old man, although clean shaven and as spruce looking in many respects as a youngster.

"Lawton," said the detective, coming directly to the subject, "Morris tells me that you have served Mr. Sturtevant a long time."

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "I served his father before him."

"Then, supposedly, Lawton, you are familiar with a certain tattoo inscription that was on Mr. Robert Sturtevant's back between his shoulders," said the detective quietly.

The butler started back a little and bit his lip as if he were surprised and were endeavoring to refrain from uttering an exclamation, but he replied calmly enough in the two words:

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know anything about the origin of that inscription?" asked Nick.

"No, sir."

"Or when it was done?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell me why it was done?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anything about it at all?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Yet you have long been aware of its presence there?"

"I have; yes, sir."

"When did you first know that it was there?"

"I have always known it."

"Always? Since when? What do you mean by always?"

"Why, since it was put there, sir."

"Ah! now I am getting at it. Lawton, I thought you were lying to me and I want to tell you right now that you had better be truthful. So you do know when it was put there, do you?"

"I know nothing about it, sir," said the butler doggedly.

"Lawton, for some reason, you are lying to me. I suppose it is for some reason you have promised Roger Sturtevant's father you would never tell anybody about it. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you not think it is your duty now, under the present circumstances, to tell me all you know about those tattoo marks?"

"I don't think, sir, that it could ever be my duty to break a promise to my master, Mr. Roger's father, now that he is dead and has been dead for many years."

"Perhaps, Lawton, that I can convince you that you are mistaken."

"I doubt it, Mr. Carter, if you will excuse me for saying so."

"You have always been a faithful servant, haven't you, Lawton?"

"I have tried to be so."

"You loved your master—I refer to Mr. Roger's father."

"I was devoted to him, Mr. Carter."

"And you were also fond of your late master, Mr. Roger?"

"I was as devoted to him as to his father."

"You have been shocked have you not by the tragedy of his death?"

"More than I can describe to you."

"And even more greatly shocked by the disappearance of his body from the drawing-room of this house?"

"It has overwhelmed me, sir."

"Lawton, if I can convince you, that by revealing to me all that you know concerning those tattoo marks, you will aid me in recovering the body that was stolen and also in discovering the murderer of Roger Sturtevant, will you unbosom yourself to me?"

"No, sir; I must still refuse."

"Why so, Lawton?"

"Because of the promise I made to Roger's father."

"Don't you think if he were here now or if he could speak to you from beyond the grave, Lawton, that he would advise you to tell me all you know?"

"I know that he would not," said the old man with decision.

"Why?"

"I know that he would not; that is sufficient, sir."

"Will you tell me how old Roger was at the time the crossed swords were tattooed upon his back?"

"No, sir; I will tell you nothing about it. I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir, but I will tell you nothing about it."

"Won't you even tell me what the crossed swords mean?"

"You must excuse me, sir."

"To me, Lawton, they indicate something very much like a duel."

"Very probably, sir; I believe that when men fight with swords they hold them in that manner."

"They would suggest to me," continued the detective, "that at the time that tattooing was done, Roger's father had already fought a duel with another man and had probably killed him. Isn't that what the word 'Kismet' means underneath them, Lawton?"

The old man had grown a shade paler if that were possible and it was evident that he was holding himself in by a great effort but he made no reply whatever, continuing to gaze stonily and with utterly expressionless face upon the detective who was questioning him so ruthlessly.

"Lawton," said the detective again after another pause; "I can read still more from that picture of the two swords and the fateful word beneath it."

"Really, sir," said the butler, "I must ask you to excuse me; I have duties to perform and——"

"Lawton," the detective spoke sternly now. "You will seat yourself in that chair facing me. You will remain here in this room until I bid you leave it. Of course I cannot force you to answer questions but I can force you to remain here and listen to me while I ask them and that I intend you to do."

The old man sank down upon a chair the detective had indicated, uttering a deep sigh as he did so, and placing the tips of his fingers together, he looked squarely at the detective, his mask-like face depicting nothing whatever of the emotions that the detective knew were surging within him.

"I am going to tell you what I read from that design, Lawson," said the detective, with low emphasis; for he had determined now to draw upon his imagination (to the extent of depicting scenes that he had never dreamed of until this moment, hoping by the very extravagance and utter improbability of the pictures he would draw, to force the old man into some sort of expression of countenance or words which would betray the correctness of even one single idea which the detective might pursue.

"Lawton," he said, "I want you to listen to me carefully. If I am too far wrong in any of my conjectures, correct me. If I am right, your silence and absolute lack of expression in your face will assure me of it. You see, Lawton, I am placing you between two fires, as it were."

The old man remained stonily calm and presently the detective resumed:

"I see two men who may have been relatives—possibly they were brothers—at enmity with each other. I see them perhaps in love with the same young woman, whom we will say was beautiful. I see them growing farther and farther apart, hating each other yet more gradually as time goes on until there is an open rupture between them; when one perhaps wins the consent of the object of their mutual passion. I see matters brought to a climax between them by an actual fight, which might have been fisticuffs or only a blow which one struck the other. I see the marriage, Lawton, where one of these two young men was made happy and the other one miserable. I see the happy one depart with his bride with all the world around him apparently glorious and beautiful while the other one remains in sadness alone thinking out measures of revenge against his successful rival. Lawton, what do you think of my pictures?"

"I think, sir, if you will permit me to say it, that your imagination does you credit."

Although Lawton's words were ironical to the last degree and also impertinent if viewed from one standpoint, the detective knew that they had cost the man a very great effort for he realized in the relation and description of that picture he had drawn from his imagination, that he had touched upon more than one sensitive recollection of Lawton's. There had been at times an almost imperceptible tightening of the lips; there had been the same sort of narrowing of the eyes. There had been a suggestion of dilation and contraction of their pupils. There had been apparent difficulty and some irregularity in the man's breathing and there had been other evidences, almost imperceptible of themselves, but accumulative as a whole, to assure the detective that he was not so far wrong as he might have been in the statements he had made.

"I see," he said, without giving heed to the old man's remark, "that the unfortunate rival seeks to console himself with another love; I see that time passes and that children are born of these two marriages, one at least of each, but, Lawton, notwithstanding the fact that the deserted rival sought consolation elsewhere, I see also that he never forgot or forgave the wrong that he believed had been visited upon him." The detective leaned forward a little closer to the butler and went on; "I see that that man possessed a revengeful heart and I see him finally plotting for some reason which I cannot now determine to deprive his former rival of the son that had been born to him through his marriage with the woman both these men had loved."

The old man now bit his lip unmistakably and the pallor of his skin had increased until it was almost as white as his hair; however, he did not speak.

"Lawton," said the detective, "I don't see that Roger Sturtevant's father ever consented to having that tattooing done upon the back of his infant boy. Had it been done with his permission or at his request there would have been a reason for it which he might have been willing to tell to Roger when the boy was old enough and he would not have deemed it necessary to swear you to secrecy about it.

"Therefore, Lawton, I must determine that the tattooing was done without his consent, against his wishes, but"—and here the detective leaned closer—"nevertheless in his presence!"

"You are a devil incarnate!" exclaimed the butler, and he pitched headlong from his chair to the floor, insensible.

CHAPTER IX.

SEARCHING FOR THE SECRET.

The detective rang the bell at once, summoning Morris to him, for he had instructed the valet, after communicating with the housekeeper, to wait within call. As soon as Morris appeared, the detective directed him to care for the old man who already showed evidences of returning consciousness, and then asked where he would find the housekeeper and what her name was.

He went directly to her as soon as he was told, having requested Morris not only to care for the old butler and to give him everything he required, but to detain him in that room until the detective returned.

He found in the housekeeper a motherly, placid-faced, wholesome old lady, who smiled somewhat sadly upon him as he entered the room where she was awaiting him, a room which by the way was separated by one other from the very room in which his interview with the butler had taken place so recently.

"Mrs. Bundy," he said to her, "I suppose Morris told you that I wanted to ask you some questions about the early life of Mr. Sturtevant, did he not?"

"Yes, sir; in effect, that."

"You have been with the family I understand since before he was born."

She hesitated a moment, before she replied and then she said rather slowly:

"I was with the family, Mr. Carter, before he was born. I was not with them when he was born."

"Mrs. Bundy I may as well come to the question I am most desirous of asking you."

"Yes, sir."

"I want to know what you can tell me about the tattoo marks on Mr. Roger Sturtevant's back between his shoulders."

The housekeeper was not made of the same sort of stuff as the old butler and she had not her emotions under such perfect control. Her facial expression was as open as a book, for it had been her province in early life to be nurse, lady's maid, and other things besides the housekeeper and she was very plainly one whose heart had always been full of love for those who did her kindnesses.

And now she started violently when the detective abruptly asked this question about the tattoo marks.

She caught her breath and gasped affrightedly, searched about her with her eyes for some means of escaping from the room, and then with an expression that was as near to sullenness as her placid and kindly face could assume, she replied as Lawton had done:

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"Is it possible," said Nick, "that Lawton has lied to me?"

"Why, sir," she gasped, "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I have said, Mrs. Bundy, is it possible that Lawton has lied to me?"

"Do you mean, sir," she sputtered, for she was plainly angered by the suggestion, "that Lawton has dared to tell you that I could give you information on this subject?"

"I had certainly somehow received the impression that you could do so, Mrs. Bundy," said the detective, smiling at her; and then, after an instant's hesitation, he added, "and I have just been interviewing Lawton."

For a moment it appeared as if she did not know what to say. Nick had succeeded in giving her the impression or rather in creating in her mind the impression that Lawton had said in so many words she could tell him the secret and reveal the mystery connected with the tattooing on Roger Sturtevant's back. He had not said so. He had not intended to say so, but he had wished to convey that impression, and under the circumstances he was entirely excusable for doing so.

"Has Lawton broken his sacred promise to a man who is dead?" she exclaimed.

"I can tell you nothing about that, Mrs. Bundy, and if you please, let us drop Lawton from our discussion for the present. What I desire to know is, what you can tell me in regard to those tattoo marks."

"I can tell you nothing, sir," she replied, and Nick saw and understood in that reply of hers that she could be quite as obstinate as the butler if she chose to do so.

"Have I been misinformed, Mrs. Bundy, in supposing that you loved your young master?" he asked her.

"I loved him better than anything; better than everything in the world," she answered decidedly, and two great tears rolled down her cheeks that she mopped away industriously with a handkerchief.

"Then if that is true," continued the detective, "am I to suppose that you decline to do me a service now that he is dead and cannot serve himself?"

"To do him a service," she repeated after him.

"Yes."

"How could I possibly serve him now, sir?"

"By aiding me first to discover who killed him; second to find out who has stolen his body from this house and third to return it here so it can be properly buried."

"How can I do that, sir? I don't understand it."

"You can do it, Mrs. Bundy, by telling me all you know about those tattoo marks."

"I have promised, sir, sacredly promised, never to tell what I know about them."

"But, Mrs. Bundy, do you consider that promise so sacred that it should not be broken even for the sake of performing the services I have described to you?"

"Pardon me, sir," she said nervously, "but I cannot understand how any revelation from me concerning the tattooing on Mr. Roger Sturtevant's back could possibly be of service to you now?"

"Isn't it true," said Nick, leaving the point for a moment, "that the tattooing was done when Roger was very young?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"How old was he at the time?"

"He was less than two years old, sir. The marks, when they were placed there, reached all the way across his little back and it was terribly inflamed after he was tortured like that and everybody was helpless to prevent it. It was a horrible thing, Mr. Carter, a horrible thing."

"Were you present when it was done?" asked Nick.

"No, sir; I didn't know about it till afterward."

"How long afterward?"

"It was only two days later, sir. I was going to them—I was on my way to them when it happened."

"By the expression 'going to them,' I suppose you mean you were on your way to join Roger's father and mother?"

The woman's jaws snapped together and her expression changed as she exclaimed:

"Lawton has not told you, then?"

Nick saw that he had made a mistake but he very quickly rectified it by smiling and saying easily:

"I told you that I suspected that Lawton lied to me. Won't you answer my question, now?"

"Yes, sir; I was on my way to join Roger's father and the baby."

"The mother was not there, then?"

"She was dead, sir."

"I did not know that she died when Roger was born; and the tattooing you say, happened a few days after you arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who did it?"

"A sailorman off the ship; so they told me."

"Who secured his services to do it?"

"Didn't Lawton tell you that?" she demanded.

"I am asking now for your version of the affair, Mrs. Bundy."

"Well, if I tell you anything, it will be the truth; it won't be a pack of lies."

"I quite appreciate that," said Nick, smiling again. "Now, tell me if you please, who it was that took the sailor there to tattoo the baby's skin."

"It was Mr. Arthur of course, it could not have been any one else."

"Very good, Mrs. Bundy, and now, who was Mr. Arthur?"

"Why, he was Roger's uncle, sir, the brother of Mr. Thomas Sturtevant, Mr. Roger's father."

"And why was such a villainous thing as that tattooing resorted to; tell me that. Why did Arthur Sturtevant try to mark the child of his brother in such a way?"

"I cannot tell you that, sir. I must not tell you. I was sworn to secrecy many years ago and I took an oath which I should not break. If Lawton has told you, you must act upon the information he has given you and not seek to obtain more from me."

"And if Lawton has not told me?" asked Nick.

"Even in that case," she replied, "I must not tell you, Mr. Carter. Please do not ask me."

"I will change the method of my questioning," he pursued, "and will refer to something else now. Something to which you can perhaps give me an answer."

"I will tell you anything I can so long as it does not interfere with my promise to the dead."

"Tell me this, then," said the detective. "When you were on your way to join Roger's father and the child at the time you did go to them two days after the tattooing occurred, where was Lawton?"

"He was there, sir, with Mr. Thomas Sturtevant, Roger's father."

"By the way, where were they at that time when the tattooing occurred?"

"In London, sir."

"And Lawton was there with Mr. Sturtevant?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what capacity?"

"He was Mr. Thomas Sturtevant's valet."

"Was he present when the tattooing was done?"

"Yes, sir; that is, as I understand it."

"How does it happen that they did not prevent it?"

"For the very good reason that they could not do so."

"Why not, Mrs. Bundy?"

"They were both bound and gagged and tied to their chairs and were compelled to sit there and look on while it was being done."

Nick smiled when he remembered that this description was not unlike the suggestion he had made when he had his talk with Lawton, and he understood now why the old man had called him a devil, and then fallen unconscious because of the self-restraint he had put upon himself.

"I suppose," said Nick, "that it was Mr. Arthur Sturtevant who bound those two men and gagged them and tied them to their chairs."

"Yes, sir, it was; Mr. Arthur and the ruffians he had with him."

"How many were there?" asked Nick.

"Four; so I have been told, sir."

"Four besides the sailor who did the work?"

"I really don't know as to that. I think, however, that he counted for one of the four."

"Now, Mrs. Bundy, won't you tell me why the tattooing was done and why there has always been such a mystery about it, and why you and Lawton were sworn to secrecy, and why young Roger himself was never made acquainted with the mystery about it?"

"I cannot, Mr. Carter, really, I cannot."

"I wish," said Nick, "that I could convince you of the wisdom of doing so."

"I cannot," she repeated and burst into tears.

For a moment, Nick watched her sympathetically and then after asking if she would wait there for him until his return and securing her consent to that arrangement, he left her abruptly and returned to Lawton.

He found the old man seated in the chair where he had left him, only now he was face to face with Morris at whom he was staring savagely as if he attributed the present trouble into which he had fallen entirely to the agency of the valet.

"Morris," said the detective as he entered the room, "go to Mrs. Bundy and remain with her until I return; I will not be long;" and then after Morris had left the room he began his experiment on the old butler.

"Lawton," he said, "while I have been absent from the room, I have been discussing this same matter with Mrs. Bundy, who has, I believe, been in the service of this family, about the same length of time as you."

"Yes, sir," replied Lawton, who was evidently trying hard to be respectful in his answers, yet strongly resented the position in which he was placed.

"Mrs. Bundy has told me a great deal concerning the relations of you two with the family, and also about the tattoo marks," continued the detective.

"I hope," said Lawton evenly, "that Mrs. Bundy has not so far forgotten herself as to betray her promise to the dead."

"As to that," replied the detective, "if I could only make you see how unnecessary it is for you to keep to that promise, and how very necessary it is that you should give me all the assistance in your power by telling me all you know, I am sure you would help me by answering my questions; and now, Lawton, why did you not admit the truth to me when I guessed that you were bound and gagged and tied to a chair in the presence of your master at the time the baby was tattooed?"

"Did you guess it?" asked Lawton, without replying to the question.

"I made a statement, did I not?"

"Yes, sir; you made a statement in fact."

"It was Mr. Arthur Sturtevant who took the sailor with him to do the tattooing and who captured you and Mr. Thomas Sturtevant and bound and gagged you both, compelling you to witness the ceremony?"

"So Mrs. Bundy has betrayed us," muttered Lawton bitterly.

"It is not a matter of betrayal, Lawton, it is a matter of necessary confidence. I am satisfied that upon this mystery of the tattooing rests the entire explanation of the murder of your young master and of the theft of his body afterward. Now, Lawton, will you confide in me entirely?"

"No, sir; I will tell you no more than I have done."

"Who fought the duel depicted in that tattooed picture, Lawton?"

"I don't know."

"You are lying to me now, Lawton."

"Yes, I lied to you."

"Then you do know."

"I do not know."

"If the telling of what I am trying to wring from you could recall your young master to life, would you tell it?"

"No, sir."

"Is it because you regard a promise to the dead so sacred?"

"I regard all promises as sacred."

"You beg the question, Lawton. Is it because you regard a promise so sacred that you will not answer the question that I asked you, or is there another reason?"

"You must pardon me, sir, if I seem to answer you impertinently. I do not wish to do so, my training has always been otherwise, but I am compelled to say to you

now that I will reply to no further questions you may ask me in any way touching upon the subjects you have questioned me. I shall be dumb," and the old man's mouth shut like a steel trap and his eyes glared obstinately and stolidly into the detective's.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNTERFEIT DUEL.

Nick Carter was now convinced that there was absolutely no information to be obtained from Lawton, the butler, and he, therefore, dismissed him, telling him that he might retire as soon as he cared to do so, for the hour was already late; but he returned to Mrs. Bundy, and made one last effort with her, which, however, resulted no better, for, although she seemed willing to reply to any questions which referred abstractly to the subject, she was no less stubborn in regard to the vital points of the incident.

When he had dismissed her, also, he called Morris and Patsy to him, and the three seated themselves together in a room by themselves, for the detective had determined upon attempting a trick which he thought might draw the information he wanted from the old butler.

"Morris," he said to the valet, "can you tell me if among the effects of your dead master there is anywhere a picture of Roger Sturtevant's father, which was taken about the time when Roger was born?"

"I know where there is such a picture," replied Morris. "It hangs on the wall in the room that Mr. Roger Sturtevant always occupied in this house. I have seen old Lawton standing before it a good many times in an attitude of almost worship, and once he told me it was exactly like his master when he was a young man like Roger."

"Can you get it and bring it to me here?" asked Nick.

"Certainly, sir."

"Do so; and be careful that no one discovers you. I don't wish it to be known that you have removed the picture from its place."

"Very well, sir."

"And, another thing, Morris. There has been a good deal said to-night about Mr. Arthur Sturtevant. Do you know if there is a picture of him in the house?"

"I don't know, sir, save that there is an old album up-stairs, which contains many pictures of members of the family. The one you seek might be among them."

"All right, Morris. Bring it to me with the other."

It was perhaps twenty minutes later when Morris reentered the room with the two articles he had been requested to bring, and, after a short inspection of the portrait of Roger's father, the detective turned his attention to the album and its contents.

There are few families that do not possess one of these old-fashioned albums, for the time was not so many years ago when it was the custom, and an almost universal one, to preserve in this manner every photograph that came into the possession of its owner; and now, as Nick Carter turned the thick and gilt-edged leaves, many members of the Sturtevant family passed in panoramic view before his eyes, while underneath each picture, within a bordered space provided for the purpose, had been written the name of the person whose picture appeared above it, and the date when it was made.

A picture of Arthur Sturtevant was there, as was also a photograph from which the crayon of Thomas Sturtevant, brought to the room by Morris, had been copied. There was a picture of Roger's mother, with the date underneath, showing that it was taken about a year before his birth; and there were pictures of many other Sturtevants.

All of these Nick Carter studied closely, discovering that there was a strong family likeness in every face.

There are some families where fathers and sons for generations bear the same facial characteristics to a marked degree; it is noticeable to-day in the Vanderbilt family, and among the Goulds.

The crayon-portrait of Thomas Sturtevant might have been, with some alteration in the costume and the pose, a picture of Roger himself, and yet there was that distinction and difference which would have assured any one at once that it was not he, but his father, or another member of the family whom he resembled.

The photograph of Arthur Sturtevant found in the album was also strangely like Roger—even more so, Nick Carter thought, than the one of Thomas; and yet the personages of the two men, Arthur and Thomas, when placed side by side, and, viewed together, were strikingly different, although quite as strikingly similar; a paradox, perhaps, but one that may be easily understood.

Roger Sturtevant had been a man of about Nick Carter's height and build—rather shorter in statue, perhaps, if anything; and it was the detective's conclusion, therefore, that his father and other relations before him had also been men whose stature was rather below the medium.

The detective sat beside the table, studying these pictures in utter silence, while his two companions regarded him expectantly, without the least idea of what was evolving in his mind; but at last he spoke to Patsy in these words:

"Old Lawton, the butler, is not only familiar with the entire secret of this affair, which I wish to learn, but I am convinced that he knows even more about the business than a mere explanation of the tattoo marks and of the incidents of the duel would unfold. In other

words, Patsy, there is some mystery behind all that which Lawton knows about, and which he has sworn to himself he will never reveal. It is not his promise to the dead which has made him so obstinate, but it is some personal resolution on his part of loyalty to the Sturtevant family, which he will not break because he fears that by doing so he might dishonor somebody's memory.

"And so, Patsy, if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain, and I have resolved to frighten that old fellow into a revelation of his secret. It is not midnight yet, quite, and we have ample time to do it."

He turned to Morris then, and continued:

"Morris, your master was always fond of athletics, and I know that he made a collection of arms and weapons in every country that he visited. Probably somewhere in this house there is a room which would pass as a gymnasium, and, doubtless, in that room is the collection of weapons I have referred to. Am I right?"

"You are, sir; only that it is in a separate building erected purposely with that end in view. It is over near the stables."

"I think, then," said Nick, "we will go there at once, if you will lead the way, Morris. You may bring that crayon-portrait, while I carry the album. We will need them."

Arrived at the gymnasium, and with all the lights it contained glowing brightly, the detective began at once the performance of an old trick of his by transforming Patsy into as perfect an imitation as he could make of Thomas Sturtevant; and, when that was done, he began work on his own person, and with the aid of the accessories he always carried around with him in such undertakings he reproduced in his own face as nearly as possible a resemblance to the Arthur Sturtevant of the photograph in the album. From the collection on the walls he then selected two rapiers, and, after giving full and final instructions to his two companions, he led the way, at two o'clock in the morning, back across the lawn to the mansion, and the three proceeded at once up the stairs and along the corridor until they stopped before the door of the room occupied by Lawton, the butler.

The fact that the door was locked on the inside was no impediment to the detective, for he speedily turned the key with the aid of burglar's forceps, and then, as silently opened the door, and stepped across the threshold, while he paused to listen. He could hear the steady breathing of the old man, which denoted that he slept soundly and peacefully, notwithstanding the excitement of the day; and the three passed silently into the room and the door was closed behind them.

Then, while Nick and Patsy assumed positions in the middle of the room, near the foot of the bed, Morris, following instructions he had received, took a position where he was partly concealed, but from which he could throw the lights of the two electric torches he carried upon Nick and Patsy when he should receive the word of command to do so.

When all was in readiness the detective and his assistant began to clash their rapiers together, as if they were engaged in a fencing-bout, so that the ring of steel against steel sounded sharply through the room; and, with the second or third stroke, Lawton started, wide-awake, and half-raised himself upon the bed where he was lying.

With the fourth stroke of the steel weapons, Morris, from his place of concealment, pressed the buttons of the electric torches, and, holding the two steadily aimed in front of him, threw the lights from them upon the seeming duelists.

The two stood there, facing each other, a few feet beyond the foot of the bed, in the attitude of duelists who fight with rapiers; stripped to the waist, save for thin white shirts, which were open at the throat, and, made up as they were, in strong resemblance to the men of the Sturtevant family, and, indistinctly seen, as they necessarily were in the imitation limelight, they resembled what Nick Carter had intended they should do, the spirits of those who had fought together many years before.

For Nick Carter, in making up, had not been sparing in the powder he used, and the two faces were deathlike in their whiteness, and, of course, remained so while the dueling apparently continued in deadly earnest.

The clash of steel against steel filled the room, although there was no other sound made or uttered than that; and the old man upon the bed, who had first raised himself to his elbow, gradually sat up straight, while his face depicted all the horror he must have felt because of the uncanny scene that was being enacted before him. Bit by bit he leaned still farther forward, his under-jaw dropped, his eyes staring, and he seemed scarcely to breath while he watched with horrified eagerness the fight to the death that was apparently going on before his eyes.

Patsy held in his left hand a sponge, which Nick Carter had prepared exactly as it is done on the theatrical stage, when representations like this one are to be enacted; the sponge had been soaked full of water that was dyed red with one of the pigments that the detective carried with him; and now, at the proper moment, when Nick Carter, who was enacting the part that had been played in that tragic scene by Arthur Sturtevant, made a sudden thrust forward with his sword, so that the point of it passed between Patsy's right arm and his body, the latter threw up his left hand suddenly,

and clapped the soaked sponge against his breast, forcibly pressing it there.

The consequence was that the stained water splashed out in every direction, and made a large blotch of red against the white shirt where Patsy pressed it, and upon which Morris at that instant directed both the lights he held.

And, at the same instant, acting under instructions from the detective, Patsy uttered a loud groan, and sank with a crashing thud to the floor.

The lights which had revealed this reenacted tragedy were suddenly extinguished, leaving the room in total darkness, and for one instant following upon it there was a deathlike silence.

But this was broken by a half-shriek, half-groan from the old man on the bed, who uttered an exclamation of terror, and threw himself backward upon the pillow, pulling the clothes over his head as he did so.

The detective had foreseen something of this happening, and had provided for it; and now he reached forward, and, seizing the bedclothes, tore them away from the grasp of the butler.

And then, in repsonse to a hissing sound he made, Morris threw the lights directly upon the detective again, who was now standing directly facing the butler across the footboard of the bed, with his arms folded, but with the rapier held in plain sight of the frightened man; and the saturated sponge had been drawn the length of the rapier, so that it seemed to be dripping with the blood of its victim.

And this was what the old man saw when he opened his horrified eyes after the bedclothing was snatched away from him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO ROGER STURTEVANTS.

It seemed, perhaps, a cruel thing to do, to frighten that old man so thoroughly, but there was a reason for it, and an important one, since Nick Carter had determined that through him, and him alone, could an explanation of the entire mystery of that house and family be obtained; and it was only through such an explanation that the murder of Sturtevant, and the subsequent theft of his body, could be explained.

How well the detective had calculated we shall see; and we shall also discover how easy it was for the detective to be mistaken in his conclusions.

He had thought up to this time and the interval that succeeded it, that he needed only an explanation of the tattoo marks, and of the duel which was the forerunner of them, to enable him to trace out the criminal he was pursuing; but he had not thought that his efforts would lead him directly to the principal himself.

It has been stated already that Lawton, although an old man, was wonderfully slender and vigorous for one of his age and condition, and it is well to bear that fact in mind in following out the explanations which will ensue.

Now, as the old man felt the bedclothing snatched away from him, and started up again, the lights from the two electric torches that Morris held gleamed squarely upon the face and so much of the body of Nick Carter as could be seen above the footboard of the bed, where he stood facing Lawton in his assumed character of Arthur Sturtevant, the victorious duelist.

For a few minutes the old man gazed in horror, trembling like a leaf in a breeze, and evidently entirely convinced of the reality of what he had witnessed; and then, in a husky, tremulous voice, he cried out:

"Mr. Arthur! Mr. Arthur! Oh, my God!"

The detective made no reply; he remained in the position he had assumed, with his arms folded, and the stained blade of the rapier extended from his right hand over the bed, and pointing toward Lawton.

Then, acting under the instructions that had been given him by the detective, Patsy rose, slowly and silently, behind the other apparition, and stood there, with the great blotch of red paint on the bosom of his shirt when the lights that Morris held were turned upon him.

Again the old man uttered a half-shriek, and covered his eyes with his hands, and in that instant Nick Carter sank out of sight below the footboard of the bed, leaving only the apparition of the man who had been wounded—the apparition of Thomas Sturtevant—visible to the old man's eyes when he uncovered them.

For a moment there was a deathlike stillness in the room, and then, with a sudden cry, Lawton sprang from the bed to the floor, and dropped upon his knees there, clasping his hands together in a supplicating attitude.

While he knelt there his jaws moved rapidly in efforts he made to speak, although no sound issued from them, and then, with a suddenness that was appalling, he sank in a heap upon the floor in a dead faint.

Instantly, then, Nick Carter stepped forward and raised him, returning him to the bed, and then, with Morris' assistance, they rearranged the clothing around him and over him, so that when they withdrew from the room finally it was left in every particular exactly as they had found it upon entering.

The detective even used his burglar's forceps again to relock the door, after which the three conspirators stole softly away to cross the lawn and return to the gymnasium, leaving the old man to recover consciousness as he would, and to be more than ever convinced that he had seen a genuine visitation from the other world.

It did not take the detective long to restore himself to his ordinary appearance, and then, leaving Patsy and Morris in the gymnasium together, he returned to the

house, but waited outside until he saw lights gleaming through the windows of the butler's room; then he entered it, and ascended directly to Lawton's door, against which he rapped loudly.

"Who is there?" inquired a tremulous voice from the inside, after he had been obliged to repeat his summons three separate times.

"It is Mr. Carter, Lawton; let me in," replied the detective; and it was with some evidence of eagerness that the key was turned and the door thrown open to admit him.

Lawton, still arrayed in his night-gown, which trailed upon the floor, and with a face almost as white as the material of his gown, stepped back tremblingly for the detective to enter, and then closed and locked the door, as if he feared that others might follow!

"What has been going on here, Lawton?" demanded the detective, with some sternness.

"Why, sir, why?" asked Lawton affrightedly.

"There were noises here," said Nick; "noises that we could not explain. It sounded like hammering, or like metal striking on metal, and there was a sound as if some one fell upon the floor, and there were shrieks and groans; and, finally, there was a light from your window. What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh, sir, did you hear them? Did you hear them, too?"

"I have just told you that I heard them. What has happened?"

"Oh, sir! It was awful, awful! It was horrible!"

"What was awful? What was horrible?"

"The duel, sir! The duel!"

"The duel!" exclaimed Nick. "Has it just come to your mind to remember the duel, Lawton?"

"Not that duel, sir; this one."

"This one! What do you mean?"

"Oh, sir, you will not believe me, I am sure you will not believe me, but to-night, Mr. Arthur and Mr. Thomas Sturtevant appeared there at the foot of my bed, in the middle of the floor, fighting with swords, just as they must have fought together years ago, when Mr. Thomas was so badly wounded that he almost died, and when the baby was stolen away from us and taken we knew not where."

"Ah!" said Nick, who felt that at last he was obtaining some information.

"I think, Mr. Carter," continued Lawton, "that it was all done over again before my eyes, because I would not tell you of the part that I have taken in this affair."

"I think it very likely, Lawton, if it is true what you have told me; that you have seen a representation of that old duel that was fought so many years ago."

"Oh, I have, sir! I have! And at the end of it my master stood there before me, with the wound in the right breast, exactly in the spot where he received it, and through which I nursed him."

"But you did not see the original duel, did you, Lawton?"

"No, sir. I only knew about it after it had happened."

"And the baby was stolen, Lawton, right after the duel? Is that what you have just told me?"

"Yes, sir. During the night that followed it. When we thought that Mr. Thomas would never recover from his wound. When we were all gathered about his bedside, and the child was for the moment forgotten."

"And then, Lawton—what happened, then?"

"Why, then, sir, the child disappeared; young Roger was stolen, and it was more than a year before he was returned to us."

"Go on, Lawton. Tell me the rest of the story."

"We searched everywhere, sir. Mr. Thomas paid out a fortune to detectives, when he was well enough to do so, in his efforts to find the child; and at last a letter came from Mr. Arthur Sturtevant, in which he said that he would return little Roger to his father, upon condition of the payment of a certain sum of money; I do not remember how much it was."

"Well; go on, Lawton."

"I don't know about the arrangements they made for the payment of the money, Mr. Carter, but it was paid and the child, as we supposed, was brought back, and then, sir, it was not very long afterward when Mr. Arthur appeared, accompanied by the men whom Mrs. Bundy has described, and tied us into chairs, while those tattoo marks were placed on the baby's back.

"I remember, sir, what Mr. Arthur said when he went away that night after the tattooing was done. He laughed horribly as he stood by the door, and sneered back at his brother.

" 'Some one will come here, presently, to release you,' he said to us, 'and to care for the child. I have marked him so that you will always know he is your own, no matter how many times he may be lost again.'

"With that, sir, he went out, and it was not until many years afterward, not until after my master's death, that I learned that the child that had been returned to us, and tattooed in our presence, was not the son of Mr. Thomas Sturtevant and his wife, but was a younger child, by some months, and that Arthur Sturtevant was his father."

"And you have kept this secret locked in your own breast?" demanded the detective sternly.

"I have told nobody of it, sir. Not even Mrs. Bundy. Even she has never suspected that Roger Sturtevant was not the son of Thomas Sturtevant, our master."

"Why have you kept this secret, Lawton? Why did you not reveal it at once?"

"Because, sir, I hoped to find my real master somewhere in the world."

"How did the information come to you? How did you learn the truth?"

"It came to me in a letter, sir, that came to me from Mr. Arthur Sturtevant, when he was dying in Paris, twelve years ago."

"Where is that letter now?"

"I have it, sir, locked away in the safe, but I can tell you, sir, the substance of what it contained."

"Tell me, then."

"You must know, sir, that Mr. Thomas Sturtevant had inherited the greater part of the fortune, and that Mr. Arthur had long since dissipated his own portion of it. He, therefore, assumed the position that his brother had not only robbed him of a considerable part of the inheritance which should have been his, but had also stolen away his sweetheart. I know that he compelled Mr. Thomas to fight the duel with him with swords, for they were both hot-blooded and passionate, and that very soon after that duel, when Mr. Arthur learned that his brother would recover from the wound he had received, he decided to steal his brother's child, Roger, and get his revenge in that way. Later, when the child had been stolen, the idea occurred to him to substitute his own offspring for the real Roger Sturtevant, for Arthur had no love for his own child, or for the woman who bore him.

"It was, in substance, what I have just told you that he wrote to me in the letter, adding the information that the other child, the real Roger, was tattooed in precisely the same manner as this one, with the single difference that, in the other case, above the crossed swords are the additional letters, 'R. S.'"

"So," said Nick, "you have known for twelve years, have you, that the Roger Sturtevant whom you were serving was not Roger Sturtevant, at all, and not the rightful heir to the property he was enjoying."

"Yes, sir."

"And have you searched for the real Roger Sturtevant?"

"I searched every day and every hour, sir, until I discovered him."

"What? You found him?"

"Yes, sir; two years ago."

"Where?"

The old butler hung his head for a moment in silence, and then, in scarcely audible tones, he replied:

"I found him in a prison, sir."

"Did you see him?" asked Nick.

"I did."

"And talk with him?"

"I did."

"Did you tell him who he was, and what he was?"

"I did, sir."

"Where is he now?"

The old man was silent for a moment, and then he replied slowly:

"I do not know, sir. He was here in this house yesterday, but he is gone, and I do not know where."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN WHO COMMITTED THE CRIME.

The revelation made to him by the old butler was not at all what the detective had expected. It had developed into a complication of family-affairs which he had not foreseen at all, and for a long time he was silent, while his mind went back in retrospect over the incidents of the case, as he was associated with them.

He had known Roger Sturtevant as a boy; as lads they had played together. Their acquaintance had never been intimate, but it had been continuous up to the time when Roger had come into the personal enjoyment of his fortune, and after that they had drifted apart until it occurred that they saw each other rarely.

Summed up in a few words, all that the detective had ever known about Roger was that he had lost both father and mother, and had inherited a large fortune; and that he was under the care and guidance of guardians who had been placed over him by the terms of his father's will.

But now the whole thing which had resulted in the death, and, finally, in the stealing of the body of the young millionaire, seemed clear to the detective.

The real Roger Sturtevant, reared, probably, under conditions which had led him far astray from the paths of rectitude, had finally gotten himself in prison, and there the faithful old butler, who held his loyalty to his old master above everything else, had found him; and there, also, he had revealed the truth of his birth to him—a secret which should never have been told under such conditions; which should have been told to the now dead Roger first, and—but it was too late to conjecture on what might have been done, or upon what should have been done.

Presently, the detective lifted his eyes again to the old butler, who stood, with downcast head, before him, and he said sternly:

"So, Lawton, you have known all along who killed Roger Sturtevant, have you?"

"Yes, sir. I have known who killed the young man who was generally supposed to be Roger Sturtevant."

"Never mind that part of it. So far as we are concerned now he *was* Roger Sturtevant, and we must so regard him. It was a man named Ledyard—that is, a man who passed under the name of Ledyard, was it not?"

"Yes, sir," agreed the old man, with a start.

"And it was the same man who stole the body, was it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know that the crime—the first one, I mean—was to be committed, before it was actually done, Lawton?"

"I did, sir."

"And you lifted no hand to prevent it? Are you such a scoundrel as all that, Lawton?"

The old man hung his head still lower, and did not reply; and the detective went on:

"This other Sturtevant—the man who was in prison, and who should be there now, disguised himself as one Ledyard, and pursued his cousin to the hotel, where he had rooms, and coolly murdered him; he used a hatpin for a weapon, and as if to give a further idea that the crime was committed by a woman, he took the pains to drop a gilded hairpin on the floor, where I would find it; eh?"

"A what, sir?"

The detective repeated his statement, and the old man stared at him in surprise.

"I know nothing about a *hair*pin, sir," he said vaguely.

"Who said you did?"

"But I should know, sir; I was there."

"There! Where?"

"In that room, sir—when the murder was done."

"*You* were there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you mean that you went there with the murderer, Lawton?"

"I went there alone," was the astounding reply. "I was the man Ledyard. It was I. It was I who committed that crime. It was I who purchased the hatpin at a store on Sixth Avenue the day before the crime and took it with me to the hotel, to use it as a weapon. I had been told that it was a very effective weapon to use; that if a man one intended to kill were struck surely and sharply with such a weapon, so that it would pierce his heart, he would never know pain—that he would die instantly; but I know nothing about a hairpin. If you found one there it must have been dropped by some other person, sir; by one who, perhaps, occupied the room before, or by the maid who cared for it. It might have been carried there from another room by the maid, and dropped where you found it, by accident; at all events, I know nothing about it."

Nick permitted the butler to wander on in his rambling talk, too greatly astounded to care to interrupt him; and during it all the old man spoke stolidly, as if he were reciting the deed of another person, which did not particularly affect himself.

"Why did you commit that horrible deed, Lawton?" asked the detective calmly, for he saw that the old man was now prepared to tell everything.

"It was justice, sir, justice. The man I killed had no right to the fortune he was enjoying. The man who did have a right to it, was deprived of it. The man who did have a right to it was my beloved master's son. The man whom I killed was the son of a man I hated, the son of the man who caused my master's death. I thought that I would revenge myself upon all of them at once, and set matters right."

"Set them right by the commission of a murder! Lawton, are you crazy?"

"Perhaps so, sir."

"And this fiend of a cousin stood by idly, and let you do this thing?"

"No, sir. There you are mistaken. He knew nothing about it. He——"

"What?"

"It is true, sir. I have told you that I found Mr. Roger in prison——"

"Refer to him, if you please, by the name he has been known by. Refer only to the dead man as Roger."

"Mr. Robert, then. That is his name. He prefers to use it, too. I found him in prison, for a crime of which he was innocent. He had been charged with forgery, but the guilty man confessed, and Mr. Robert was set free. Then he came to me to learn more of the truth about his birth. I told him all—everything. I explained the tattooing on his back, and when he exhibited it to me there were the R and the S, just as his supposed father's letter to me had described them.

"I showed him the letter written by Mr. Arthur, and I begged him to make himself known to Mr. Roger, and to settle things, so that he would come into his own, and to his real name.

"But he would not consent. He got into the habit of coming here to see me and Mrs. Bundy, however, and, finally, he almost lived here, for Roger was rarely at this house at all.

"He is a good young man, a handsome man; he is just like what his father used to be. I came to love him, and so did Mrs. Bundy—much better than either of us ever loved the Roger that you knew, sir.

"The realization of the wrong that had been done grew upon me, and I plead with Robert time after time to have it righted; but he would do nothing. He always laughed at me, replying that he had enough for his needs, and two strong arms to work with when that should be gone—and, finally, sir, he told me that he would never come here to see me again, as long as he lived, unless I made a solemn promise I would never refer to the subject again.

"I made the promise, sir, and I kept it—until after I killed Roger."

"And then, Lawton, did you confess to Robert that you were the murderer?"

"No, sir. I did not dare do that. He would have

killed me, I think. Robert saw the article in the paper, in which it was said that a woman committed the deed, and he believed it must be true. He never thought of connecting me with the crime."

"Go on, Lawton. I did not dream that you could be so interesting, or that you had so much character in that villainous old head of yours."

"Perhaps it was a villainous act, sir, but I regarded it as a just one. I believed that I was righting a great wrong that had endured for many years—and I did it."

"Go on with your story. What more about Robert? Where does he enter into this affair?"

"He does not enter into it at all, sir."

"Go on. You have said that he was here yesterday. When did he come here?"

"He came with the body, sir. He wears a beard and mustache, and, therefore, does not look like the Sturtevants. He was here at the moment of your arrival, but he kept in the background, out of your sight. He did not suspect that it was I who stole the body away and sunk it in the lake——"

"What?"

"It was I, sir. I did it alone. I tried to turn the key from the outside, with a pair of pinchers, as I have heard that burglars sometimes do. But I could not do it, and so I went around through the house and carried the body out to the lake. I carried it to the boat, and rowed with it out upon the lake; and then I tied a crowbar to it, and sunk it—in the middle of the pond, sir.

"Nobody saw me. I rowed on across the lake and made marks on the shore, over there, as if the men who took the body had landed there, and then I rubbed out the marks, to make it all appear more real—as if they had tried to obliterate the marks, sir. And then I returned to the house.

"It was only a few minutes after my return when it was discovered that the body was gone, sir, and—you know the rest."

"Go on. Go on."

"You arrived at just that moment, sir. Robert ran to me for confirmation of the news. He believed that the woman who committed the murder—whom he supposed committed the murder—had also stolen the body, and he said to me, in his rapid way: 'It will not do for me to appear in this, Lawton, but I will find that body, and also the murderer, before you see me again.' I have not seen him since that moment, sir."

They were interrupted at that moment by a violent ringing of the bell at the front door, and Nick descended himself to reply to the summons, ordering Lawton sternly to dress himself.

There were three men at the front door, and two of them bore in their hands, on an improvised stretcher, the body of Roger Sturtevant, which had been recovered from the lake. The third man was rather tall, and bearded, and Nick guessed at once that he was Robert Sturtevant, returned.

"You are Mr. Carter, I take it," said the bearded stranger, at once; and he spoke in a frank, easy tone, which at once impressed the detective. "I may as well tell you at once that there is a mystery in this family which we will force old Lawton to explain to you later. But, for the present, it is sufficient to say that I am related to the family. My name is Robert Sturtevant. These two men are the gardeners. One of them saw old Lawton sink the body of my cousin in the lake, in the afternoon of yesterday. He told me about it, and together we dragged the bottom of the pond, in the darkness, till we found it. Will you let us enter, sir?"

The body of Roger Sturtevant was returned to the casket, Morris being summoned at once to attend to that, while Nick led Robert Sturtevant at once to the room where he had left Lawton.

They found the old man there, precisely as Nick had left him, but he was grinning hideously to himself, and repeating over and over again the words:

"To right a wrong. I did it. I did it. To right a wrong. I did it. I did it."

Over and over, over and over, with never a change. His mind had become a total blank in the short time since the detective left him.

It only remains to be said that Lawton was taken to an asylum, where he died a month later, without ever recovering a glimmer of reason.

Thorough investigation by the detective established the absolute truth of all that the old butler had told him—that he alone was guilty of the double crime, and that Robert Sturtevant was in no way connected with it.

And so it came out that Lawton had righted a wrong, after all, for Robert Sturtevant was the only heir to the fortune that Roger left, and so it fell to him, naturally. But when the case was closed, and Patsy and his chief were discussing it, Nick said to his assistant:

"It all goes to show, my lad, how easy it is for the best of us to be deceived by appearances. I have always thought that by putting two and two together, you would get four; but here is a case where there was no result at all, and where I would never have guessed the truth; where it could only be discovered through having it told by some one who knew."

THE END.

The next number (367) will contain "The Plot of the Stantons; or, Nick Carter Prevents the Theft of a Fortune."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Don't think that in order to cultivate your muscles it is necessary to have a whole roomful of expensive apparatus. Of course it is very nice to be the possessor of a few dozen such things as Indian clubs, bell-bars, punching-bags, "exercisers," "chest-expanders," and so forth. But, with some will-power and perseverance, you can do wonders with a pair of, say, four-pound (each) dumb-bells and a pair of flesh gloves. It is not even imperative that you have the dumb-bells; and for the flesh gloves you may substitute a good rough bath-towel.

Naturally enough, a capital way to begin muscle-building is to join a gymnasium, where an instructor will start you on the right road. But, there again, that is not absolutely necessary.

If you do not employ dumb-bells, use your clenched fists, doing your exercises deliberately, just as if you held dumb-bells in your hands. There are professional "strong men" who, as we are contending, instruct their pupils that muscle-cultivation is quite possible without any apparatus at all. It is the constant contracting and extending of a muscle that causes it to increase in size.

A good exercise to start work with is the following: Stand on your toes, and reach up with your doubled fists as high as you can. Now drop as low as you can, the hands gripping the thighs. Throw back your shoulders as far as possible, push forward your ribs. Done in a room full of fresh air, this is a capital "pipe-opener."

After a spell of exercise, have a thorough rubbing with the flesh gloves, or rough bath-towel; not a general polish over, but "going for," and well kneading each muscle separately. Knead away till your skin is a glowing pink. Rubbing with an embrocation, finishing with the flesh gloves, soon, with exercise, raises muscle. Horse embrocation, mixed with olive oil, is in favor with many athletes.

In the beginning, and until all your muscles are hardened, be very careful not to strain any limb or, more important still, any internal muscle. If you do strain a muscle, however slightly, rest the part, but continue the rubbing. Our muscle-building is meant to be a pleasant relaxation, not a trouble.

Of course, if wise, you will exercise "all over"; not cultivating one muscle and neglecting the others. "I don't want to look like a camel," protested one youth, who had been doing shoulder and back exercises only. "What are the biceps?" a boy was once asked. His answer was: "Your muscles," and he was quite surprised when any number of other muscles were pointed out to him. It is very interesting to get some little book on the subject of the muscles, and then you can cultivate them "by name." Never forget to exercise right and left an equal number of times.

When your muscles have, after a week or two, got into condition, this is a fine exercise to put yourself in trim for a spell of practising: Stand erect, then go down on your hands; pause a moment, and then, leaning forward, shoot out the legs. Now go slowly down till your chest touches the ground, then raise yourself up till your arms are straight. Then resume first position and stand erect.

The rather curious fact may here just be referred to that too much exercise lessens the size of the muscles. That is why, for instance, the legs of some professional runners are extremely small. We shall, however, of course not overdo our exercises to such an extent.

As will be readily appreciated, we cannot here show all the actual exercises, with dumb-bells and without, that the young muscle-builder will adopt. There are, literally, hundreds of them. You can learn them from various charts and hand-books; or—and this is quite entertaining—you can invent them for yourself. Take a particular muscle, discover what evolutions contract and extend it, and you will have added another exercise to your list. Treat all your muscles like this, and you will be quite an expert in physical training.

Plenty of boys are always in sufficiently good athletic trim to start muscle-building at any time without fear of strain. Still, you can't be too careful, particularly with the muscles of the waist.

Lie on your back on a table or bench, and slowly raise first one leg and then the other. Later, when the waist muscles have become hardened, you may raise both legs together, and then pass on to lying flat on the ground, and, in the same way, bringing the toes of both feet to the floor beyond your head.

Although taking up muscle-cultivation as a kind of healthy hobby, you will very likely, at the same time, be following some other sport or athletic pastime. Therefore, never, while increasing the size of your muscles, allow yourself to become what we may term ponderous. In other words, carefully mingle light, quick work with your more muscular efforts. Large, supple muscles are much better to have than heavy, hard ones. You will find that if, after a deal of work, your muscles get too hard and stiff, the application of hot flannels to them will speedily restore them to the desired healthy elasticity.

It is not a bad plan to do your muscle-exercising when some one in the house is playing music, your actions keeping time to the tune. It helps one along. Or, you yourself

may hum, or, as we may put it, quietly hiss a tune. We know one young Scot who has thus built up big muscles, chiefly to the tune of, what he has rechristened, "The Dumbbells are Coming."

Miss Susie Watson, of Bunker Hill, Massachusetts, has a cotton dress which is 150 years old and in a clean and neat condition.

The cloth was spun by hand by Miss Margaret Wilson, who married Ben Benson, father of Early Benson, deceased. The cotton was hand-picked. The dress was used by Miss Wilson as a wedding-dress.

An octopus, or devil-fish, which is said to be the largest ever captured in southern California waters, was taken by Captain Alf Swenson, of the launch *Leone,* while returning from a trip to the fishing-banks.

This sea-monster measures 12 feet from tip to tip of its snakelike arms. It has a sharp, hard mouth, resembling a parrot's bill. Its tentacles are twice as big as the arm of an ordinary man.

The giant devil-fish was not captured without a hard fight. It was discovered dozing on top of the water, and the crew of the *Leone* cleverly managed to surround it with a strong net. After being awakened, the monster fought furiously, and it required the combined strength of the three brawny fishermen to land it on the deck of the *Leone.*

Some Maysville, Missouri, men decided to have a wolf-chase. They took a pack of hounds out into a large pasture and released a wolf that had been a captive since cub-hood. The wolf suspected no evil, and, wagging its lean, moth-eaten tail, made advances of friendship toward the dogs. The hounds fell on the "critter" and devoured it. Says the local paper: "Nearly every man that had anything to do with the chase felt not a little bit sneakin' over the way it terminated, and it is hard to find a man around town now that will admit that he was there."

After the last great hurricane in Nicaragua, it was believed that many of the rubber plantations were ruined. But the trees, in some cases, being simply thrown over and not uprooted, sent up new shoots, which took roots of their own, so that now some of the owners have more trees than they had before.

The first patent in America was granted to Joseph Jenks, a founder and machinist, who had emigrated from Hammersmith, England, where he was born in 1602.

He was a very ingenious man, and was induced by Governor Winthrop, the younger, to come to Lynn, Massachusetts, about 1642, as master mechanic, to establish "the iron and steel-works."

He was the acknowledged head of the iron-smelting and founding business, and the first builder of machinery in this country, and first patentee of invention in America, having introduced the idea—first granted by act of Parliament in 1625—of protection for the manufacture of improvements by petition to the government of Massachusetts Bay.

In 1646 he took patents for mill improvements, and in 1655 he patented the present form of the grass scythe, for which he should be held in grateful remembrance. In 1652 he made dies for the first coinage of money, the pine-tree shillings. In 1654 he built the first fire-engine, to the order of the selectmen of Boston—the first ever built in the country; in 1657 he built a forge and entered upon the manufacture of his improved scythes nine years before his application was granted.

Charged with selling permission to outsiders to come into her yard and look through the holes in her fence at a base-ball-game at Piedmont Park, Atlanta, Georgia, without a license, Mrs. M. Hatchett was dragged to a police-court, and, after a hearing, she was allowed her freedom by the recorder.

Detective Lockhart made the case at the instance of the police officer at the park. It was stated that Mrs. Hatchett charged 5 cents a head to look through the cracks and holes in her fence, which is part of the fence enclosing the base-ball-ground, and see the games. One little boy was in court as a witness, and testified to having paid Mrs. Hatchett's little girl a nickel to see the game, but, not being well pleased with the location, had his money refunded and left.

Mrs. Hatchett denied that she charged any money for looking through the holes. There was no evidence produced during the trial that Mrs. Hatchett was engaged in such a business, and Judge Broyles dismissed the case on condition that the lady did not accept any pay from those people whom she allowed to go into her yard and see the games.

A dealer in furniture named Pietro Abbato, an Italian, who has lived in Bagshot, England, for very many years, recently retired from business, and, taking with him his life's savings, went to Italy. Upon arriving there, Mr. Abbato, finding all his relatives had died during his long absence, decided to return to England.

When near the French frontier he was set upon by brigands, who robbed him of all he had, with the exception of £4, and left him for dead on the road. After undergoing much suffering and many hardships, Mr. Abbato managed to reach Bagshot once again, and is now, at the age of eighty-four years, beginning to make a living for himself at his old business.

A BIG SWINDLE.

Monsieur Bouloy was a broker and banker in the Rue St. Augustin, Paris. On February 5th, an elderly lady in widow's weeds, accompanied by a young man about twenty-five years of age, who walked with a crutch and a stick, alighted from a carriage at the door of M. Bouloy's office, which they entered.

The lady, who was shown into the private room of the principal, introduced herself as the widow of a M. Duperre and the young man as her son Henri.

She assisted the young man to sit down in a comfortable position, saying:

"My son, monsieur, has the misfortune to be lame, owing to an injury he received when a child."

M. Bouloy expressed regret and asked the lady how he could serve her.

"My late husband," she replied, "left some valuable stocks, and I am anxious to dispose of a part of them. My physician, Doctor Tocanier, recommended me to apply to you as a gentleman of honor, and one well acquainted with the best methods of transacting such business, and was good enough to send us hither in his carriage."

M. Bouloy bowed and assured the lady that it would give him great pleasure to aid her in any way in his power. He glanced through the window and recognized the handsome bays and the livery of the famous physician.

"These," she continued, drawing forth a large envelope from her reticule, "are what I thought of parting with at present."

"I regret to say, madam," he said, "that at present this stock is selling far below par. I may inform you, however, that it is liable at any time to take a rise."

"That is just it, monsieur," she said, "and I desire you to keep it by you until such time as you think it judicious to sell."

After some talk, M. Bouloy opened the safe and placed the envelope with its contents therein. While he was so occupied the young man gave a groan. The lady arose hastily and cried:

"Dear me; another of those dreadful fits!"

M. Bouloy turned and saw the lady with her arms around the neck of the youth, gazing with tearful eyes and an expression of anguish upon her countenance at the closed eyes and drawn face of her son.

"Ah, it is very sad, madame," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, monsieur," was the answer, "if you could procure him a glass of brandy, it would speedily restore him."

"I will do it with pleasure," he replied, and quitted the room, going into the adjoining one and directing a clerk to get the restorative. Then he returned to the private apartment, and said that he had despatched an employee for the brandy. It was speedily brought, and the young man revived soon after a few drops had been swallowed. Then, with many thanks and expressions of gratitude, the widow and her son withdrew, accompanied to the carriage by M. Bouloy, who then returned to his sanctum, locked his safe, and attended to further business.

Next day a M. Plat visited M. Bouloy, and the latter gentleman, knowing that the former had a short time before held a large amount of the stock which Madame Duperre desired to sell, asked his visitor what he had done with it.

"Why," said he, "I hold it still, and should be glad to have more of it."

Then M. Bouloy said he had a large quantity of it to sell, and M. Plat asked to see it. M. Bouloy opened his safe and took out the envelope. On opening it, his astonishment was great when he found inside a lot of blank scrip.

"What means this?" he exclaimed, as he examined the worthless stuff. Then he turned toward the safe and began nervously to remove its contents. "I am robbed!" he cried. "Robbed of over a million francs in notes of the Bank of France. I was directed by General —— to realize for him on valuable securities, and to keep the proceeds at hand to give him at a moment's notice, and I am robbed of all. I am a ruined man!"

"Have you any clue to the thief?" asked M. Plat.

"I am dazed—I cannot think," was the answer. "I will at once consult the police. I beg that you will say nothing of the affair to any one."

M. Plat pledged his word readily, and the gentlemen quitted the office together, M. Bouloy going straight to the prefecture of police and laying his statement before the chief there. Roquepine, a famous detective, was called in, and all the facts were disclosed to him.

"It is all very clear to me, monsieur," said the detective. "Madame Duperre and her son are the thieves, without doubt. The fainting-fit was a ruse, and the request for brandy was made with the hope that you would quit the room and leave them alone with the safe. The groan and the fit came on just as you had placed the envelope in the safe, and before you had time to secure it, and the package of money was extracted."

"But how did the thieves know the money was there?" asked M. Bouloy.

"At present this is hard to say, but by and by the question may be answered," the detective replied.

"But they came in Doctor Tocanier's carriage," said the broker, "and said they were recommended to me by him. He is my physician and an intimate friend."

After further talk M. Bouloy departed, and soon after his arrival at his office he was joined by Roquepine. The latter examined the safe, listened anew to the recital of all the facts, and departed.

He first went to the residence of Doctor Tocanier, and found that gentleman at home. As he related to the doctor the circumstances of the visit of the lady calling herself Madame Duperre and the young man whom she represented as her son, to the office of M. Bouloy, and the subsequent disappearance of the money from the safe, the doctor's astonishment grew beyond description.

"I had never seen the lady or young man before," he said. "She represented she had been recommended to consult me as to the fainting-fits, to which she said the young man was subject, and after questioning him I prescribed for him. They were about to take their leave, when the young man was seized with a fit. The lady seemed distracted with grief, and appeared most anxious to get her son home.

"'However shall I get him home?' she exclaimed, 'for, to tell you the truth, doctor, I am too poor to hire a vehicle.'

"My carriage was at the door, and what could I do less than place it at their disposal? It was accepted with thanks, and, out of delicacy, I told the coachman to receive his instructions from the lady."

Doctor Tocanier summoned the coachman and questioned him. He said that he was first directed to drive to the Rue de la Paix, and that the lady requested him to take them to the office of M. Bouloy, on the Rue St. Augustin. There they alighted, and he was asked to await their return. As he had been directed by Doctor Tocanier to receive his instructions from the lady he thought that it was all right. When they returned to the carriage the lady directed him to drive to the Rue d'Enghiem, soon after turning into which they alighted, and he saw them no more.

The detective was more puzzled than ever. These persons had evidently been cleverly disguised, and probably the lameness of the young man had been assumed for the occasion. They were not likely to go in company again, and he might search months in a vain effort to come across either one of them.

Then another thought struck him. The stock which had deceived M. Bouloy was probably counterfeit. Were

this lady and this young man connected with a gang of forgers? Supposing they were, in what direction must he look for the outlaws? One thing the detective thought was certain—namely, that by some means they must have known what valuable property was in the safe. Another thing seemed equally clear, namely, that they must have known the position of the safe.

Roquepine made his way once more to see the envelope and its contents. He examined these mementos of the crime with great care, and he made a discovery. Inside the flap of the envelope were a few figures in pencil. They were very indistinct, but with the use of a powerful lens Roquepine made them out thus:

17,400 francs.
270 "
17,670

Now, the question was, what did these figures signify? To what did they relate? The detective copied them, took them away with him, and meditated over them far into the night. He reached no satisfactory conclusion. Next day he went to see M. Bouloy.

"Monsieur," he said "what do you make these figures to signify?"

"It is very hard to say," was the reply. "All that strikes me is that it is an addition of 17,400 francs and 270 francs."

"Under what circumstances would you add figures together in that way?" the detective asked.

M. Bouloy smiled.

"How could I tell?" said he. "Under any circumstances, when I wished to reach the amount of two numbers."

"When do you do this kind of sum most frequently, monsieur?" was the next question.

"When I am adding the interest to the principal," was the answer.

"That is it!" exclaimed the officer. "Now I have it. One or the other of these parties had 17,400 francs on deposit somewhere, and on drawing it, they put the figures down and added the interest. I have a clue at last."

Roquepine went on a tour of the banks where deposits were usually made. In the Rue de Maubeuge he found a small private bank, the cashier of which told him that on January 26th, Madame Fourcy had drawn from the bank the sum of 17,400 fancs, leaving on deposit 1,237 francs, and that the interest due to her on the whole deposit was 270 francs and some centimes.

"Where does Madame Fourcy reside?" asked the officer.

"Her address, as given to us, is No. 9, Rue de Laval," was the answer.

"Did she usually come herself to the bank?" asked the detective.

"She came herself, as a rule, but she was sometimes accompanied by a young man," the cashier replied.

"Many thanks, monsieur," said Roquepine, and departed.

As he went along the street, he said to himself:

"Now I think I am on the track."

He went to the prefecture of police and reported progress. Accompanied by another officer, he visited the Rue de Laval. No. 9, Madame Fourcy's residence. Roquepine rang the bell.

Was Madame Fourcy at home? No. Was the young gentleman at home? No. When was either expected? The domestic did not know, but thought both would be in soon.

The detectives watched, one at each end of the block. Presently a well-built, good-looking young man, dressed very becomingly, came along. Roquepine strolled after him. He went up the steps of No. 9. As he entered the door with a latch-key, Roquepine was upon him with a revolver to his head.

"You are my prisoner," said the officer; "offer no resistance or it will be worse for you."

He offered none, for a very good reason. He was so utterly amazed and taken aback that he became as limp as a wet rag. Roquepine put handcuffs upon him and led him into a side room, closing the door so as to leave it slightly ajar. In a few seconds a ring came to the bell. The domestic's footsteps were heard, and the door was opened. The next instant there was a scuffle, and Roquepine knew that his assistant was doing his part of the work. But a prolonged struggle and many screams in a woman's voice were heard before a well-dressed elderly woman was forced against the door and into the parlor, the officer grasping her by the wrists and preventing her, so far as he was able, from biting him.

The two prisoners were made to sit down, and while his assistant stood guard over them, Roquepine searched the house.

The domestic, who appeared to be an innocent young person, was greatly alarmed at what had happened, and was hastily preparing to quit the house. Roquepine marched her into the parlor, and placed her in charge of the officer on duty there. Papers were seized, and Roquepine, calling a cab, conducted the woman and the young man to the prefecture of police, leaving the other officer in care of the house.

Investigation showed that the young man, whose name was Frederick, was in reality the son of the woman known as Madame Fourcy. He had been for some time in the employ of General —— as private secretary, and had thus become acquainted with the fact that M. Bouloy had converted the general's stock into money, and that it was in the safe awaiting the general's pleasure. As soon as the letter informing the general of the fact came into young Fourcy's hands he conceived the idea of getting possession of the money. How to do it, however, was the difficulty. As a preliminary measure, and to prolong the time for consideration, he poured into the usual noonday cup of coffee of the general a drop of a powerful drug, which brought on a sudden and powerful attack of dysentery. Then the young man's brain concocted a scheme which his mother, a very unscrupulous woman, readily undertook to aid him in executing.

The following day the general was too ill to go out, and, at his own suggestion, the secretary visited M. Bouloy to inform him that the general would call upon him probably the next day or the day after. He carefully noted the position of the safe, and then immediately went home, and, assuming the disguise which he had prepared, departed with his mother, also thoroughly disguised, to carry out the plot they had devised. The fact that Dr. Tocanier was the general's medical attendant and always drove about in a handsome carriage, suggested to young Fourcy the first part of the program.

The money was recovered, and mother and son convicted of the robbery and sentenced to terms of penal servitude.

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